

HV 8
READ THE NEW SERIAL STARTING THIS WEEK.

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1917.—VOL. LXXIV.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING JANUARY 27, 1900.

[PRICE ONE PENCE.]



"SHALL WE GO FOR A SHORT ROW?" VINCENT ASKED, AND HIS VOICE TREMBLED.

ETHELIND'S STEPMOTHER

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

IT was late on a foggy November afternoon. Everything looked dreary and miserable through the pea-soup atmosphere. Pedestrians were hurrying homeward as fast as they could, anaestheticizing the fog, which penetrated through their outer garments, making them shiver with its damp chilliness, and made its way through their lungs, causing many an attack of bronchitis and influenza.

The lighted street lamps could not be seen a short distance off, and it was a service of danger attempting to cross the roads without the assistance of a link-boy; indeed, these latter gentry were the only people found to give a good word

to the fog, and piled a brisk trade in the more frequented thoroughfares.

London does not look its best on such a day, even the grand squares and streets presenting a mournful appearance; but the shabby, dingy back streets, which are not exhilarating to look at even in the brilliant sunshine of a Jane morning, were more depressing than ordinary seen through the medium of the thick yellow mist.

This was particularly the case with a small row of houses leading out of one of the thoroughfares where fifth-rate lodgings are let.

In one of the smallest and dingiest of these houses, in a tiny parlour, poorly and scantily furnished, a woman sat crouching over the apology for a fire, trying to get a little warmth into her chilled frame. She still bore the remains of beauty on her face, but sorrow and illness had whitened her hair, sharpened her features, and left heavy traces on her once smooth brow.

There was no superfluous furniture in the

room, and the sole covering for the floor was a strip of hempen drapery in front of the fireplace, between the bars of which the wretched fire feebly spluttered.

There was a folding-door; and through this, which was partially open, an inner room could be seen containing a bed covered with a coarse-coloured quilt, a common-painted wash-hand stand, and one cane chair, while a large wooden box had to do double duty as a wardrobe and dressing-table combined.

The woman, who was sitting over the fire, every now and then raised her head, and looked anxiously towards the door, evidently expecting some one.

"I wonder what makes her so late to-day?" she said, querulously. "She knows how lonely I am, and nobody makes my beef-tea as well as she does. I wish she would come home sooner, she might think a little more of my comfort than she does."

She sat there complaining to herself and shivering for some time longer, but never at-

tempted to get her beef-tea, which had been ready prepared for her, and only required warming in the little enamelled saucepan which was placed beside the basin containing it.

Neither did she dream of setting out the tea-things or preparing anything for the evening meal. She was too much engrossed with the contemplation of her own woes and the hardships she had to endure to spare a thought for anyone else's comfort, even though that someone might be working hard all day trying to keep the wolf from the door, and had a long dreary trudge home through the fog and mist, and might have been cheered by the sight of a cosy meal ready, if only of plain material, and a pleasant face to welcome her after her day's work. But the woman only thought of herself, and felt extra ill-used by her daughter's unusual lateness.

At length, however, the door opened, and a girl entered. She might, may, she would have been pretty under altered conditions, but there was a weary, depleted look upon her pale thin face that robbed it of its youth, and told of worry, trouble, and insufficient food. She came over to the other woman and fondly kissed her.

"I am sorry I am late, mother, dear!" she said; "but Mrs. Brown asked me to trim a cap for her after the children's lessons were finished, and of course I could not refuse, and then the fog was so thick that I lost my way, and thought I should never reach home to-night; but here I am, safe you see, after all!"

"It was very unfeeling and selfish of Mrs. Brown to detain you," her mother said, complainingly. "She knows what an invalid I am. It is bad enough having to do without you all day; she ought not to keep you longer than the time she pays you for. To think that my daughter should have to gain her bread by teaching a grocer's children! It is dreadful, and it might be so different if you would only be reasonable!" she added, beginning to weep.

"There, there, mother, dear," her daughter said hastily, as though she wished to get away from a disagreeable subject, "do not cry. Mrs. Brown is not at all a bad woman! See what she has given me for trimming her cap; we shall have quite a feast to-night!" and she displayed a box of sardines, a pot of strawberry jam, and three new-laid eggs. "These eggs she has sent specially for you. Now I will see about getting your tea."

She passed into the bedroom, removed her coat and hat, and then began to prepare the evening meal. Under her skilful manipulation the fire was soon burning brightly, the kettle singing merrily on the hob, and the cups and saucers neatly placed on the clean, though coarse table-cloth.

She opened the pot of jam, made some crisp toast, and boiled one of the new-laid eggs; she then placed a chair with cushions in it at that side of the table nearest the fire.

"There, mother!" she exclaimed. "Though you have had to wait for it, it is a better tea than you have had for a long time!"

She carefully assisted her mother to her place at the table, and lovingly attended to all her wants before she seated herself for the rest and refreshment she so much needed.

Under the influence of the warmth and the unexpected dainties Mrs. Warren became more cheerful. She watched her daughter moving about with languid interest. For the first time she noticed how thin and pale Adelaide looked.

"You are a good child," she said, with unwonted gentleness in her tones, "but how I wish you could make up your mind to accept Mr. Bruton. He would give you a splendid establishment. It would be far better for you than slaving at the drudgery of teaching those unruly children for a very small salary."

"Mother!"

Bat Mrs. Warren was not to be stopped now she had got on to her pet grievance.

"Only fancy, you might have your town house, your mansion in the country, your box at the opera, diamonds fit for a princess, horses and carriages. Oh! and to think that you persist in

slaving at the drudgery of teaching." Words failed to explain Mrs. Warren's wonderment at such perversity and want of knowing what was due to herself.

"I prefer the 'drudgery,' as you call it, mother," Adelaide answered, quietly, "to marrying a man I could not love. I can imagine no more awful fate for a woman than that of being an unloving wife."

"But still," her mother went on, harping on the same string, "it would be so nice if you had a fine house, horses and carriages, and plenty of money!"

"Granted, mother," Adelaide said, wearily. "It would be pleasant to be rich if—if there was not such a price to be paid for it as becoming Mr. Bruton's wife."

Mrs. Warren could not understand her daughter's objection to marrying a man old enough to be her father, and stout and bald into the bargain, when against these trifling disadvantages his wealth was thrown into the scale.

She forgot now that her own had been a love-match, and could only regret the position she had lost.

It was the old story; her husband had been a very rich man, but a bank had broken and swept away the whole of his property. He had sunk under the blow, leaving a widow and one daughter totally unprovided for.

The widow had brooded and repined over her losses till she became a hypochondriacal invalid.

The daughter, on the contrary, though a young girl, put her shoulder to the wheel and her pride in her pocket. She looked out at once for some employment, and did not refuse the situation of governess in a rich grocer's family, although it sorely hurt her mother's pride to think that her darling, whom she would have liked to see queen in society, was reduced to earning in such a fashion the money which kept them both from starvation.

"What is the matter with Mr. Bruton?" Mrs. Warren pursued, in spite of her daughter's evident distaste of the subject. "I am sure he is a very agreeable man. I cannot see why you should object to him. Many girls would jump at the chance there is offered to you."

"Then I am not like other girls, I suppose, for I certainly could not jump at it."

"You are incorrigible, I am afraid," with a lugubrious sigh, as she remembered all the good things Adelaide's obstinacy was depriving her of. "You are not in love with anyone else?" she added, with sudden suspicion, thinking she might have a clue to her daughter's strange behaviour.

"No, I'm not in love with anyone else," Adelaide said, flushing slightly under her mother's keen gaze.

She spoke truly. She was not in love, but like most other young girls, she had her day-dreams, and her ideal hero presented a very different appearance from the man her mother was so anxious she should marry.

"Then I cannot understand your conduct."

"Oh! mother, I am afraid we shall never agree upon this subject. With regard to Mr. Bruton, in the first place he is more than double my age. In the second he has a daughter nearly as old as myself, and I do not think she would care to have a stepmother."

"Oh! she would soon get married with the fortune her father will give her; she need not be an obstacle long," Mrs. Warren said, eagerly.

She had somewhat of a selfish object in persuading her daughter into this marriage, for she missed terribly all the luxuries to which she had been accustomed, and which Adelaide, strive and deny herself as she might, was unable now to procure for her.

"Mother, I could not marry that man!" the girl said, coming over and kneeling beside her chair. "We are happy here together, are we not, dear?" rather wistfully. "I shall make more money in time, and then you shall have everything you require; but please do not ask me to marry any more!"

"You are a good daughter, Adelaide," Mrs. Warren said, more gently, stroking the glossy

hair as she spoke; "but it seems a pity that your youth should be so cheerless, when if you had your rights you ought to be a leader of society. Oh! if things had only turned out differently, and you were still the rich heiress, Miss Warren—"

"Would you then wish Mr. Bruton for your son-in-law?" Adelaide could not help asking her mother.

"Certainly not, my child!" Mrs. Warren answered, promptly. "Under those circumstances, with your beauty you might have aspired to be a countess."

"I would rather have happiness than rank, mother."

"Yes; but you might have both, Adelaide. No, certainly had your prospects been the same as before your poor father died I would not counsel you to marry Mr. Bruton; but now it seems the only way of escape from drudgery and a wretched life."

"Still, mother, I would rather work as I do than be unhappy as a rich man's wife. I do not fear poverty for myself; it is only for you. I should like to be able to make some more money, so that you might have the comforts you have been accustomed to. But let us be hopeful, it is no use meeting troubles half-way."

"Well, Adelaide, as I see you are determined against marrying Mr. Bruton we will say no more upon the subject;" but Mrs. Warren could not suppress a heavy sigh at the thought that all her castle-building must come to the ground.

For some time after this Adelaide had peace upon the subject of her unwelcome suitor, her mother not even mentioning his name to her.

The time passed drearily enough for Adelaide. All day she had to teach the grocer's chuckle-headed children, who, although they were not badly dispositions, were hopelessly stupid, and taxed the whole of her powers and patience sorely.

By the time the lessons were over she was tired out in body and mind, and very often had an aching head as well. Yet she strove always to have a cheerful face to greet her mother with, made light of her own troubles and worries, listened to all Mrs. Warren's feeble complaints with the most unfailing good humour, and tried to cheer her up by picturing all the things they would do when she should be better off.

But she often felt weary of it all, and longed for some change.

If they could only go into the country for a short time what a relief it would be; but that was out of the question. Not only could she not afford the expense, but also her invalid mother could not travel in that severe weather in the only way that they could go—namely, third-class.

There would be risk for an invalid—and such Mrs. Warren had undoubtedly become—travelling in a warmed saloon carriage, with hot-water bottles, plenty of soft wraps and all the luxuries wealth can command. How much more, then, was there in a third class, open through the whole compartment, and where some curmudgeon would doubtless be found who would want the whole of the windows opened in spite of the severity of the weather.

In spite of the bold front she bore to her mother, Adelaide often thought what a bitter thing poverty was. In that miserable cold weather she had to get up about six o'clock, wash in cold water, and dress by the aid of a candle, for she had to lay the fire, sweep out and dust the tiny sitting-room, and prepare her mother's supply of beef-tea for the day; give her her breakfast in bed, get her own scanty meal, and yet sit at her employer's, who lived some distance off, punctually at nine; and as even the humble "bus" or "tram" were beyond her slender means, she had to walk there and back, no matter what the weather might be. It was no wonder at times that her cheerful spirit gave way, and she felt desponding.

Was all her life to be spent in this unceasing round of grinding work and poverty?



Were no youthful pleasures to come to brighten her sombre existence?

She was only twenty. It was a hard life for one so young to lead, and one, too, who had been reared in luxury.

She suffered, there was no denying it to herself, though she strove to appear happy and contented before her mother.

Her present existence was so very different from that in which her childhood and early girlhood had been passed. The thought would intrude, unbidden perhaps, but still it would come.

If she accepted Mr. Bruton all this would be changed. She could live in even greater luxury than in her father's lifetime, and above all she could place her ailing mother once more in a position of comfort.

It was a temptation, but still she could not make up her mind to say "yes!" to her elderly, romantic-looking lover.

Christmas was drawing near!

Christmas, that is such a pleasant time for the well-to-do, such mockery to the poor, with the shops displaying their wealth of Christmas cheer which they cannot purchase.

It is the time for hampers and presents being sent between friends and relations; and though many benevolent persons open their hearts and their purse-strings to relieve their poorer brethren, there are many of the latter, alas! to whom the festive season brings nothing of the gladness and rejoicing which are supposed to be its fit accompaniments.

Adelaide remembered how very different Christmas was in her childhood. Then she was one of the most favoured recipients of its bounty, the most expensive toys and bon-bons being lavished upon her with unsparing stint. Now, when it would have been such a boon to her and her mother to receive a present, everyone seemed to have forgotten them.

Not one of the friends who had so often enjoyed Mr. Warren's hospitality remembered or sought out his widow and daughter in the days of their adversity. No fat turkey or brace of pheasants reached their humble abode, though numerous had been the such-like gifts distributed by their generosity in the days of their plentitude.

Well, indeed, were the holidays to Adelaide, though she had not to work so hard, but could devote her whole time to her mother. But at length Christmas and the New Year were over, and she was preparing to resume her duties of instruction to her dull pupils, when a letter from Mrs. Brown informed her that some of the children had caught the scarlet fever, and as of course it would be some months before they could resume their studies, she thought Miss Warren had better look out for some other post.

This was a terrible blow for Adelaide, as although the salary was not high, yet it enabled her to keep her mother and herself from starvation.

Her heart sank at the prospect before her, for in these days of Girton College students and certificated governesses, she knew how difficult it was to get a place. Though she had received an expensive education, she had been taught at home, and therefore could not produce testimonials when requested to do so.

The grocer's wife had not been particular. She was a good-natured woman, who had received little or no education herself, and she did not trouble herself about her governess not being certificated, especially as Adelaide never refused to trim a bonnet or make a cap for her—Mrs. Brown's fingers being more skilful at weighing out pounds of tea, sugar and currants, than twisting bows of ribbon and pieces of lace into becoming head-gear.

Adelaide tried to hide from her mother how desponding she felt, but as day after day passed, and her weary tramps from place to place were productive of nothing save disappointment, even Mrs. Warren noticed how white and worried she had grown, and she was obliged to admit how she had failed, in answer to her mother's questions.

The letter did not openly complain, indeed she could not, seeing how hard her daughter

tried to get some employment, and how she denied herself even necessaries, so that she might still have her few little comforts; but she brooded in silence over this last misfortune till she made herself really and alarmingly ill.

Adelaide was at her wits' end what to do. She owed her landlady a month's rent, and had scarcely any money left. How was she to pay a doctor's fees? She tried to nurse her mother without the aid of a physician; but Mrs. Warren grew so seriously ill that one morning, in spite of knowing that she had nothing wherewith to pay him, she was so alarmed by her mother's state that she sent the landlady for a doctor.

When he came and had examined his patient, he told Adelaide that she must have the strongest nourishment, port wine, beef tea, jelly, &c., and also very careful nursing if she was to recover even the semblance of health.

"Indeed, Miss Warren," he said, looking at the girl's white face and sunken cheeks, "you are scarcely fit yourself to undertake such arduous duties. Your mother should have a trained hospital nurse."

Poor Adelaide clasped her hands in despair, but did not reply.

He might as well have told her to get the Koh-i-Noor, or some other equally impossible thing.

"I know a very good nurse. Shall I send her to you to-day?" he asked, as he was going away.

"Not—to-day, doctor," faltered Adelaide, in reply. She knew how expensive sick nurses were, and how much they required to eat, and she had not the money to buy the barest necessities of life, let alone the things her mother needed so badly. "I—I am used to nursing, and she—she likes to have me rather than a stranger."

"Well, well, my dear young lady, as you please," returned the elderly doctor. He had a shrewd suspicion as to the true state of the case. "Only if you do not take care of yourself I shall have you on my hands as well, and then—"

He did not finish the sentence, for the dull misery in the girl's eyes touched him.

Long after he was gone Adelaide sat facing the difficulties which seemed to hem her in on every side. She was torn with conflicting emotions.

She had but to say "yes" to Mr. Bruton, and all that wealth could do to alleviate her mother's sufferings would be in her power to bestow. Had she any right to withhold this from Mrs. Warren? Was she not selfish in thus putting her own feelings before her mother's welfare?

But then to sacrifice herself in her youth! To give up all her day-dreams of a young and handsome lover! To be tied for life to an elderly, uninteresting man. She felt it would be a sacrifice.

She shrank from doing it.

Or, if only help would come to them from some other source; but how seldom it comes in a case like this, where it would be so precious!

Life seemed very hard to the wretched girl in those dark days.

Would she not be a murderer if she allowed her mother to die for want of the help it was in her power to give?

So she wrestled and prayed, but the longed-for help did not come.

She hesitated, and for a few days held out, hoping that her mother might mend; but Mrs. Warren got worse, and actually seemed dying before her eyes.

Then, and then only, when her mother was dying by inches, and she had not a farthing in the house to pay the landlady, or to purchase the nutriment so imperatively needed, Adelaide took a desperate resolve—she would sacrifice herself to save her beloved parent's life.

CHAPTER II.

In the breakfast-room of a house in Elvaston-place, Mr. Bruton and his daughter Ethelind were taking their morning meal.

The table was covered with glittering silver

and costly chints, and was laden with delicacies in and out of season. In spite of its being mid-winter, rare flowers filled vases and bowls in lavish profusion, and fruits and exotics were placed in every available nook and corner.

Behind the massive silver urn was seated a girl whose delicate, child-like prettiness appeared somewhat out of harmony with the rich robe she wore, and which seemed more suitable for a middle-aged dowager than for a girl whose years numbered scarcely eighteen.

But Ethelind had been motherless from early childhood; and Mr. Bruton who loved her dearly, saw no incongruity in her splendid attire, and allowed her to please herself in dress as in everything else.

"You promised you would ride with me to-day, papa," she said, as having finished his breakfast, Mr. Bruton turned his attention to the large pile of correspondence beside his plate.

Ethel never would allow him to open his letters before breakfast, as she said "they sometimes worried him and took away his appetite," and always let his coffee get cold before he tasted it.

"Rather cold, is it not, my dear?" he said, in reply.

"Oh! papa you said you would," in a disappointed tone. "I have had to ride alone so often lately, and it is so stupid."

"But Tom goes with you, my dear? Surely you do not go alone!"

"Of course he does, you stupid old dear. But you know what I mean. He rides behind, and even if he rode alongside, I could not keep up a conversation with a groom!"

"I suppose not, Ethel."

"You will come to-day."

"Well, I must, Pussy, if you insist."

"Yes, I insist. Who are all your correspondents, papa? You seem to have an extra supply of letters this morning!" continued his daughter, who, having no letters of her own to open, was watching her father as he opened his.

"Oh! I had the usual," Mr. Bruton replied; "mostly circulars, a few bills, the prospectus of the hundred and ninety-ninth new company, asking me to be a director, a hundred and ninety-eight of which are sure to be wound up in a few months or so."

"See what it is to be a rich man!"

"Yes, riches have their pains and penalties, as well as their advantages. These, my dear, will interest you more than they do me," throwing over to Ethelind the circulars of some forthcoming great sales at unheard-of reductions from the Universal Provider and other firms. "You will be able to provide yourself with gorgeous raiment at a very cheap rate."

"I do not want any more clothes, papa—at all events, at present," laughed Ethel merrily.

"Well, my dear, I am very glad to hear it," returned her father, going on with his occupation of opening letters, "I shall not have—ah!"

"What is it, papa?" said Ethel hurriedly, as that exclamation broke from her father's lips.

"You have no bad news I hope!"

"No Ethel, not exactly."

"Who is your letter from?"

"From—from a friend whom I have not heard of for some little time, and who is in trouble."

"Poor fellow!"

"This friend," said Mr. Bruton, feeling rather guilty as he saw his daughter's total unconsciousness as to the sex of the writer. "This friend is in great trouble, and wants me at once."

"To-day!"

"Yes, dear."

"And our ride!"

"Must be put off once more, Pussy. You would not have me neglect a friend in need!"

"Certainly not, papa; only I wish he had not written till to-morrow."

That letter which caused all Mr. Bruton's pulses to tingle as though he were a young man in the full flush of youth was written by Adelaide Warren.

Little did he dream of what it cost her to write that short appeal.

Under the terrible pressure of her mother's

serious illness and her utter pennilessness she had at length written to him. She began several letters, but tore them up, not being able to make up her mind to send them.

Finally she wrote,—

"I am in dreadful trouble. You once said you would always be my friend. Come to me now if you can." She added her humble address, fastened up the letter, and took it hurriedly to the post, for she feared if she lingered her resolution would fail her. Once the letter was in the post she felt that her fate was sealed.

Mr. Bruton lost no time in replying to that appeal. When he saw the dingy, cheap lodgings that sheltered the Warrens, he understood that they must have fallen upon evil times, indeed; sunk much lower in poverty from the time when he had earnestly pleaded for Adelaide's hand.

He was struck, too, by the change in the latter's appearance. Could that heavy-eyed, haggard-looking woman be the bright-faced girl whose image he had treasured in his mind in spite of her rejection of him?

But concealing his feelings of wonder, he advanced towards her with both hands outstretched.

"My dear Miss Warren, how good of you to send for me? I need hardly say what pleasure it will be to me if I can assist you in any way. I came immediately on receipt of your note."

"You—you are very kind," faltered Adelaide, a flush rising to her pale cheeks, as she felt the warm clasp of the elderly gentleman's hand, and understood that his admiration of her was in no wise abated.

"The kindness is on your side, Miss Warren. I feel honoured by your sending for me. How is Mrs. Warren? Well, I hope. It is so long since I have had the pleasure of seeing you!"

"My mother is ill—in fact very ill. Mr. Bruton," with a sudden sob in her voice, "I must be frank with you. I fear she is dying and I have no money to get her the absolute necessities of life."

"My dear young lady, why, oh! why, did you not apply to me before?" he exclaimed, horrified. "Here am I rolling in wealth, and you and your mother on the verge of starvation. It is horrible to think of."

A sob was Adelaide's only answer.

"Miss Warren," he continued, gravely, "did you think, because you had refused to marry me, that would prevent my still being your friend? My child, do not let the remembrance of my folly trouble you. Let me stand to you in your dead father's place, and tell me how I can help you. Shall it be a loan? I have my pocket-book here, or will you both come as honoured guests to my house? Ethel will welcome you, and you need never fear that I will recall the past. Let that be forgotten, as though it had never been."

Adelaide was weeping freely now. Never had the bald-headed, elderly gentleman shown to such advantage in her eyes as now, when he disclaimed all pretensions to her hand.

"You are very good!" she faltered.

"Believe me, Miss Warren, nothing will give me greater pleasure than fulfilling your wishes in any way that I can," he said, earnestly.

"You are very good, but," and Adelaide hesitated, blushing painfully as she repeated the words, "but—"

"But what, my child?"

"We cannot accept charity at your hands."

"It would not be charity, only a loan which you could pay me back at your leisure."

"Ah, no!" shaking her head, mournfully. "I should never be able to pay the money back. I—I could not take it."

"But, my dear young lady, what am I to do if you will not accept anything at my hands?"

"Mr. Bruton," she said, then paused; but finally went on, hurriedly, "a woman cannot accept favours from a man unless—unless—"

"Miss Warren," he interrupted, eagerly, but she put out her hand to stop him.

"Let me finish what I was going to say. A

woman cannot accept favours from a man save her father or brother, unless he is, or going to be, her husband."

"Miss Warren!"

"Hear me still. You—you offered some time ago that if I would marry you, my mother should always live with us, and be your care as much as mine."

"I did."

"You also said you would not mind my having no love to give you."

"Quite true."

"Are you still of the same mind?"

"Miss Warren, what does this mean?"

"It means, Mr. Bruton, that—if you do not mind, I will retract my decision."

"Adelaide," and the elderly gentleman's voice trembled with the bare thought of the joy that might be at last coming to him, "will you really marry me?"

"If you still wish it, I will."

"Do I still wish you for my wife? Oh, Adelaide! It would be the greatest happiness that could be beatoated upon me!"

"Then I will be your wife!"

"My darling! my own!" Then the rapture died out of his face. "But, Adelaide, I cannot accept your sacrifice. You are young, I am old. Let me help you as a friend—a true friend!"

"It cannot be," she said, sadly. "Only as your affianced wife can I take assistance from you. And—and I—we—have not a friend in the world. She will die."

"No; no; that must not be. Adelaide, look me in the face."

Slowly she raised her tear-laden eyes to his.

"Now, tell me. Do you love anyone else?"

"No. I have never been in love."

And the clear, truthful eyes never flickered or wavered as he gazed steadily into them.

"Remember, Adelaide, I should feel only too honoured if you will allow me to assist your mother without this sacrifice on your part. Will you not take time to think over it?"

"I have thought over it," exclaimed Adelaide, half wildly, "thought over it till my head has ached, and I am wearied out. There is no other way."

"I will marry you, my darling, thankfully, proudly. It shall be my care to make your path through life happy. Your mother, our mother, must be our first consideration."

"You are a good man, Mr. Bruton!" Adelaide said, slowly. "I will try to repay you kindness. I will be a faithful, obedient wife to you, a loving one. I cannot promise to be."

"So be it," he returned, gently, stooping to kiss her brow. "If it is in my power you shall never regret your decision to-day!"

So it was settled; for woe or woe Adelaide was pledged to become Mr. Bruton's wife.

The latter lost no time in applying the invalid with every delicacy and medical advice that her state required, and as soon as she was able to be moved he took handsome apartments for her and her daughter, Adelaide preferring not to go to Elvaston-place until she went there as its mistress.

His brother loaded with presents.

He supplied her with magnificent jewels, costly lace and splendid toilettes—everything in fact, that could possibly appertain to the position of the bride-elect of a very rich man.

Adelaide received all these presents with a sense of humiliation. It seemed to her, perhaps, too sensitive mind, that they were the price for which she had sold herself to a lovesick marriage.

For her loved mother's sake she was willing to accept the luxuries and dainties for which she was literally pluming away; but she shrank from the costly jewels, &c., that he had showered upon herself.

However, Mr. Bruton had seemed so hurt when he had tried to refuse some of the magnificent presents when he first brought them that she gave up the attempt, not liking to wound him or spoil the evident pleasure it afforded him to lavish some of his wealth upon his proposed bride.

When Ethelind first heard of her father's intention to take to himself a second wife she

had pouted and looked glum. She did not want a stepmother; they were always horrid and interfering. They had been so happy together. Why had he taken it into his dear stupid old noddle to alter all their comfortable arrangements, and introduce a she-dragon into their blissful abode? &c., &c.

Mr. Bruton said very little to his wilful daughter's tirade beyond that he was sure Adelaide would not prove a "she-dragon," and the best thing Ethelind could do would be to put on her hat and come with him to pay a visit to this dreaded prospective stepmother.

At first she demurred, "she was not going to make any advances;" then seeing her father's pained look her mood suddenly changed, and she threw her arms round his neck, and declared she would go with him at once; she had not meant to be so unkind and rude.

Her prejudice against Adelaide very soon died away after a short acquaintance.

Her intended stepmother's beautiful face and sad eyes appealed to her impressionable nature at once.

Miss Warren had not the appearance of a haughty, jubilant bride elect, who would ride rough-shod over all the members of her future household, and relegate her, Ethelind, to an insignificant place in it.

Therefore, Mr. Bruton had soon the pleasure of seeing his daughter strike up a firm friendship with his intended wife.

He was too wise to remind her of the speeches she had made when she first heard of his projected marriage. He was only too glad that she should take it so well. Thus the wedding-day drew near.

Adelaide regarded it with mixed feeling. She was thankful for the amelioration in her mother's condition, and grateful to Mr. Bruton for his unfailing kindness to her, and for his devotion to herself; but yet she half dreaded its advent.

It was the giving up of her girlish hopes and aspirations.

She would be tied for life to a man old enough to be her father. She might be happy.

He was honourable, and under his unromantic exterior she had discovered there existed chivalrous feelings which many a young, handsome man lacked.

He was good, gentle, kind. She acknowledged all this, but—

There is generally a "but."

Adelaide was young and romantic.

Up to the present she had never loved, but if in the future the love that is said to come to every human being once in their lives should come to her, that would mean—shipwreck.

She never contemplated loving the bald, elderly gentleman into whose keeping she was about to confide her whole future life.

Her dreams had always been of someone younger, handsomer, a hero likely to take a young girl's fancy; and now she must give up such dreams. Once Mrs. Bruton her thoughts must never stray from her elderly husband.

Mr. Bruton was so proud of the beautiful young bride he was about to wed that he would have liked a grand wedding.

So would Ethelind, to whom a ceremony shorn of its white satin and orange-blossoms, its bevy of fair bridesmaids and diminutive pages, seemed scarcely a wedding at all.

But Adelaide pleaded her mother's delicate state as an excuse for no show or large gathering of friends and acquaintances; and, yielding to her earnest request, Mr. Bruton consented that the ceremony should be very quiet, and that she should be married in her travelling dress. He arranged that Mrs. Warren should remain with his daughter during their honeymoon. He thought that Adelaide would feel more content when she knew her mother was not left alone.

One cold, bright morning in early spring, Adelaide Warren and George Bruton were made man and wife. Mrs. Warren was not well enough to be at the ceremony, Mr. Bruton's daughter and two or three of his relatives being the only guests.

Adelaide looked very pale, but gave the responses steadily. After it was over, and the names signed in the vestry, they drove back to

Elaston-place to take leave of Mrs. Warren, who had been installed in a comfortable suite of rooms there by her son-in-law, who had also engaged a trained hospital nurse to attend her during her daughter's absence on her bridal tour, before starting for Italy, where Adelaide had expressed a wish to pass the honeymoon.

CHAPTER III.

MORE than two years passed away. In the drawing-room of Mr. Bruton's house in Elaston-place his wife and daughter were seated.

Adelaide's face had lost its haggard look, though a slightly melancholy expression was over her features, which had gained in beauty from being no longer thin, and pinched with hunger, want, and anxiety.

She was plainly but elegantly dressed in slight mourning, and was reading, but every now and then looked up to answer some remark of her companion's, who was running her fingers over the keys of a grand piano in rather a desultory manner.

Ethelind was dressed in a soft white costume, a Lord Raglan rose nestling its dark red velvety petals close up against her white throat. She looked far more girlish, and her dress was more appropriate to her years than before her stepmother's advent.

The room in which they were bore evidence of great wealth, but it also showed refinement. The walls were painted with exquisite taste by an Italian artist who had been specially commissioned by Mr. Bruton for the purpose. The ceilings also were painted so that the cupids appeared to be flying down from the clouds out of which they had just emerged.

At one side of the room ran a conservatory filled with exquisite plants and flowers, amid which a fountain threw its silvery jets into the air, to fall back into a marble basin in which some gold and silver fish disputed themselves.

Placed about the room were some beautiful statuettes, the work of famous sculptors. Almost priceless Sèvres china filled cabinets and brackets. Books, music, and such costly trifles as women love were scattered about profusely.

It was a very different place of abode from the dingy lodgings that Adelaide had inhabited with her mother only three short years before. Sometimes Mr. Bruton's wife thought that period of existence must only be a hideous dream; she could not possibly be the woman who had been driven nearly mad for the want of the bare necessities of life.

Mrs. Warren had only lived six months after her daughter's marriage, but it was a great consolation to Adelaide to know that by her sacrifice those last months of her mother's existence had been spent in luxury.

Mr. Bruton was passionately fond of his young wife. She had not a wish ungratified, and he was constantly surprising her with some new proof of his love.

Adelaide was very grateful to him, but she often took herself to task because no warmer feeling for him had entered her heart. She was safe from every care. She was calmly, negatively happy. Her mother's death had been her sole sorrow since her marriage, and yet she knew that George Bruton's goodness, his intense love for her, deserved some better return than it was in her power to make him.

"Oh! Adelaide, I do so hope you will like him!" Ethelind exclaimed, stopping for the twentieth time in her music. She had grown very fond of her stepmother. Having no sister Adelaide supplied the place of one, and was very kind and indulgent to her.

"I daresay I shall like him if he is all that you say," Mrs. Bruton replied, with an amused smile.

She had heard a great deal lately about this cousin of Ethelind's who had been abroad, and had only just returned.

"I shall see him to-night, and then I can judge."

"He is so handsome, Adelaide, not like the ordinary run of young men!"

"You take great interest in this cousin, Ethel!"

Ethelind blushed rosy red.

"You see we were so much together before he went abroad, we were almost like brother and sister," she explained.

"I see," smiled her stepmother. "Has Annette finished your dress?"

"Yes, and it looks beautiful! The dresses you choose for me are very much prettier than those I used to get for myself, and yet they do not cost half so much."

"You bought materials which, though beautiful in themselves, were much too old for you, Ethel. Young girls look best in simple costumes."

"Yes, this is simply lovely."

"I am glad you like it, dear. Let us hope that Vincent will approve of your appearance to-night."

"What are you going to wear, Adelaide? You always dress so plainly. I wish you would put on a handsome dress just for once."

"I have been in mourning as you know, dear. However, to please you, I will dress grandly to-night."

"I am so glad, Adelaide. Vincent says that all stepmothers are horrible-looking, as well as being dreadful creatures, I want to show him that mine is very different."

"Mr. Morgan is very complimentary to stepmothers in general. I don't suppose he will make any difference for me in particular," said Adelaide, laughing.

"Ah! but he has never seen you!" returned her stepdaughter, affectionately. "He will be certain to like you. People cannot help it. Do you know, Adelaide, I tried my best to dislike you!"

"And because you did not succeed you think that your cousin must also succumb to my fascinations?"

"Yes. I know he will not be able to help himself. He will like you as much—as much as I do!" being at a loss for a simile.

Many a true word is spoken in jest. Little did Ethelind dream, as she spoke thus, of the fierce, consuming love which Adelaide was doomed to inspire in the breast of the man she herself loved with all the fervour of her innocent heart.

It is well that the future is a sealed book to mortals.

The Brutons were going to a large ball that night, to which Vincent Morgan had promised to come should he arrive from his travels in time to be present.

Mr. Bruton felt very proud of his wife and daughter that night when they appeared at the ball; and well he might, for they were the best-looking, as well as the best-dressed women in the room—Adelaide, in accordance with her promise to her stepdaughter, being magnificently attired, and wearing some of the costly gems which her husband's love had so lavishly bestowed upon her.

They caused quite a sensation, and were soon surrounded by eager claimants for their hands in the forthcoming dances.

Mr. Bruton did not dance. His dancing days were over. He stood in the doorway watching the slight form of his wife gliding gracefully round the room.

When the evening was about half over, Adelaide, who was sitting in the conservatory, resting after a dance, saw her stepdaughter approaching on the arm of a very handsome man, whose bronzed face showed that he had lately been under the influence of a warmer sun than England can boast, and whose upright, military bearing showed that he was an officer.

"Mamma," Ethelind said, with a mischievous smile, "will you allow me to introduce my cousin Vincent to you? He is very anxious to make your acquaintance."

"I shall be very pleased to welcome Mr. Morgan as a friend," Adelaide replied, bowing to him.

"Now, mamma, you can. There is Charley Carver coming for his dance. I will leave you two to become friends. Mind, you must become

very good friends for my sake!" exclaimed Ethelind, gaily, and she tripped away on the young man's arm back to the ball-room, leaving Vincent and Adelaide together.

"I have heard a great deal about you, Mrs. Bruton, from my little cousin Ethel," said Vincent, who, being an exceedingly handsome man, was accustomed to be made much of by the ladies, and was inclined to believe himself irresistible where the fair sex was concerned. "She was always writing about you. But the reality far surpasses my expectations!"

"Then I must be something very dreadful indeed," replied Adelaide, coolly.

"Mrs. Bruton!"

"Are not all stepmothers very objectionable persons?"

"Ah! I see. Ethel must have been giving you an account of my opinions. But, Mrs. Bruton, be merciful. Remember that was before I met you; they have undergone a change since!"

"Really! Your opinions must change very rapidly. You have scarcely known me ten minutes!"

"But those ten minutes have been sufficient to show me how wrong I was. I trust that you will forgive me, and allow me to be your friend. It will please Ethel; she has set her heart upon our being friends."

"Dear little Ethel! I do believe she loves me in spite of my being her stepmother. Yes, for her sake we must be friends!"

"Now that is settled satisfactorily, will you give me a dance, Mrs. Bruton?"

"Certainly!" Adelaide replied, and they were soon threading their way among the throng of dancers.

More than one person remarked that night what a handsome couple they made; he, stalwart, bronzed, the perfection of manly beauty and strength; she, with a delicate loveliness that her splendid dress only served to enhance.

Vincent Morgan seemed a more appropriate mate for Adelaide Bruton's youth and beauty than the little, bald gentleman who stood in the doorway, and watched his young wife with such evident love and admiration in his glances.

After this Vincent was a pretty constant visitor at his uncle-in-law's house in Elaston-place. He would ride with the ladies in the morning in Roten Row, go with them to garden parties or concerts in the afternoon; and constituted himself their attendant cavalier to theatres and balls in the evening.

Mr. Bruton was very well pleased with this arrangement; for, apart from the fact that Vincent was an eligible husband for his daughter, he was not sorry that he himself could stay quietly at home, was he so inclined, without fearing that by so doing he was preventing his young wife and daughter from enjoying the gaieties which it was so natural at their years they should take pleasure in.

Ethelind was thoroughly happy. She dearly liked safety of all sorts; and, besides, she was very much in love with her cousin.

Adelaide also enjoyed herself. In spite of the sorrows she had encountered she was very young, and youth cannot be always mourning. Since her mother's death she had not felt so light-hearted and happy as now. She took more interest in her own appearance, leaving off her sombre gowns and dressing in soft, light colours that set off her delicate beauty to the utmost advantage.

Almost unconsciously she found herself looking forward to Vincent's daily visits as eagerly as Ethelind herself. He was such an agreeable companion; he knew so much about society and its doings, the best days to go to Sandown or Harlington, the prettiest spots on the river for a picnic, and, altogether, made himself almost indispensable to them.

Adelaide fancied it was for Ethel's sake that she took so much interest in Vincent. She was well aware of the young girl's affection for her handsome cousin; indeed, Ethel was too artless to think of concealing it, and her stepmother would not dream of willingly breaking the vows that bound her to her elderly husband.

Still, all the same, there was a dangerous

charm for her in Vincent's companionship. He treated Ethelind as though she were a child to be alternately petted and teased, but the young girl was too much in love with him to resent this mode of treatment. Her hero could do no wrong in her eyes.

His manner to Adelaide was very different. In some indefinable way he made her understand that he looked upon her as very much superior to her stepdaughter in intellectual culture, and that she was much better fitted to be a clever man's companion.

He deferred to her in every way, and was so guarded in all that he did that she unconsciously drifted along with her eyes blinded, not knowing how perilously near she was floating to the shoals and quicksands of love—an unhallowed love, which could only end in infamy and disgrace.

Vincent Morgan was not a good man, neither was he a bad one. From early manhood he had found his conquests over the weaker sex easy ones, and he tried his power over his uncle's wife without any ulterior motive at first than that of gratifying his vanity and insatiable love of conquest.

He intended to marry Ethelind when it suited his purpose. But playing with edged tools is dangerous work; almost before he knew it Vincent had fallen madly in love with Mr. Bruton's young wife.

All sense of honour—of manliness even—was thrown to the winds in the mad passion that consumed him.

Adelaide must be his!

What recked he that in gratifying this insane love he would ruin an innocent woman, wreck a happy home, heap dishonour on the head of the man who had been uniformly kind to him from his youth up, for his dead wife's sake, whose nephew he was, break the heart of the girl who loved him so truly, and lay waste the whole of his own prospects in life? What recked he?

Nothing. He never thought of this.

He let the current of his mad love carry him where it would, without regard to consequences, even though it should lead him and all involved to utter destruction.

Yet though his love seethed and boiled like a lava flood within him, and all his pulses tingled at the touch of her soft hand or the sweep of her perfumed hair, when by chance, perhaps, in the dance his moustaches were brought into close contact with it, outwardly he so contrived to command himself that no one was conscious of what was going on, least of all Adelaide herself, who would have been horrified could she have seen on the brink of what a terrible precipice she was standing.

She had no thought of disloyalty to her husband, though her cheek flushed and her eyes grew brighter at Vincent's approach. She did not understand why it was that life seemed so much fairer these last few months; she did not connect it with the young man's advent, but was content to know that her lines had fallen in such pleasant places.

She never suspected Vincent's motive, though he would call at times when he knew Mr. Bruton and Ethelind would be out, and so far he had refrained from startling her out of her false regard.

But her eyes were to be opened in a terrible manner, and she was to see that awful abyss to which she was allowing herself to be hurried along.

One day they settled to have a water-party. They would picnic on one of the islands of the river.

As usual Vincent arranged everything.

They were a large party. Three boats were required to carry them all.

After a delightful row the whole party landed on the island that had been selected on which to picnic. There was plenty of fun among the young people during the unpacking of the bampers that had been brought with them, and after the good things they contained had been discussed, and the champagne had somewhat loosened tongues, there was a good deal of laughter and merriment.

"Mrs. Bruton," said Vincent's voice softly in her ear. "Would you not like to come for

a stroll? The young people are rather noisy here!"

"Yes, I will come!" replied Adelaide. "I am not wanted here at present."

They strolled down to the water's edge, and stood gazing at it as it washed the pebbles at their feet, or, rather, Adelaide watched it dreamily, while Vincent's eyes were eagerly drinking in the beauty of his companion's face as the sunlight, that is so merciless to an old or faded complexion, flooded her features and revealed the satin texture of her skin, the soft colouring of cheek and lip, and the burnished gloss of her hair.

Looking at her as she stood there in her unconscious loveliness, a mad desire came over Vincent to have her for his own. He would risk everything to have her to himself if only for one short half-hour.

Why should his elderly uncle possess such a peerless woman as this? Was it likely at his age he could appreciate her charms?

No, a thousand times, no! She was thrown away, lost as the wife of that man. Why had he not met her before she was married? But now—

"Shall we go for a short row?" he asked, and, in spite of himself, his voice trembled, though in her absorption she never noticed it.

"I do not know whether I can leave our guests," Adelaide said, doubtfully.

"Oh! yes, you can," he cried, eagerly: "It is only a short way. You will not be missed. There is a very pretty spot that I should like to show you!"

Still Adelaide hesitated. Perhaps Vincent's manner revealed something to her, or she thought it would not look well if she and her husband's nephew were to go alone in a boat. At all events she said, "Ethel would like to come too, I am sure. If you fetch her I will go."

Vincent muttered the reverse of a blessing. He did not at all want his cousin's presence just then.

"If you will seat yourself in the boat!" he said, "I will bring Ethel."

Adelaide did as she was requested, and Vincent turned away ostensibly for the purpose of fetching his cousin.

In a very short time he returned alone.

"Where is Ethelind? Why did you not bring her?" asked Adelaide.

"Ethel is too well employed with young Carver to care to come for a row," returned Vincent, springing in, and shoving off the boat before his companion could remonstrate.

Adelaide felt slightly vexed, she could scarcely tell why, but those half-formed suspicions which had suddenly sprung into birth at what she saw in Vincent's eyes alarmed her, and if she could she would have stepped out of the boat. But it was too late for that now, for, with a few vigorous strokes Vincent sent the boat out into mid-stream.

It was a lovely day, and the balmy sweep of the air and the soft ripple of the water as the oars dipped with rhythmic motion, the drops glistening like diamonds in the sunlight as they fell from the shining blades, soon soothed Adelaide into her former false security.

After all there was something delightful in being rocked gently on the surface of the water away from the din and chatter of heedless girls and youths, with a handsome, agreeable man for sole companion.

Adelaide yielded to the subtle charm that was stealing over her senses. She had no wish to break that sweet silence, eloquent, though she knew it not, with unspoken love.

So on they floated, each wrapped in their own thoughts, heedless how time passed, or whether they were drifting.

"How pleasant it is here on the water!" remarked Adelaide, at last, wondering somewhat at her companion's continued silence.

"Yes, I could float on for ever," was his answer then.

"Where is the spot you are going to show me? Is it far from here?"

"Not very," he replied, absently.

"I hope not, for I think we ought to be re-

turning; we have been away some time now. They will miss us," Adelaide said.

"No."

"What were you saying?"

"I say, let them miss us if they like."

"Mr. Morgan—Vincent—what can you mean?"

"I have not brought you here to show you any place on the river, and you know it."

"Vincent."

"Aye, you know why I have brought you here."

"Are you mad?"

"Mad! If I am it is you who have made me so."

"I think we had better turn back," Adelaide said, making an effort to speak calmly, though her heart was beating so violently that she felt suffocating.

Like a flash it had come across her—this man loved her; and she, another man's wife, understood now how dear, how necessary Vincent's presence was becoming—nay, had become to her.

The shock of the discovery held her speechless; the shame of it overwhelmed her and kept her silent; while Vincent went on passionately—

"Turn back! Not yet. I have brought you here to tell you that I love you, that I cannot exist without you."

"Stop, stop!" cried Adelaide, piteously. "You do not, you cannot mean what you say."

"I do, Adelaide; you are the only woman in the world for me. My darling, you love me. We will go away together to some sunny clime and live a life of perfect bliss, 'the world forgetting, by the world forgot.' The felicity of two hearts beating as one shall be ours. There is a glorious future of love before us, my own!"

He had left his oars, and coming over to her, before she was aware of what he was going to do, had clasped her in his arms, while the love words poured out in a burring torrent that she could not have stemmed even had she tried to do so.

For one brief moment the spell of his words held her entranced.

To pass her life at the side of one whom she loved, what greater bliss than that could the world hold! Loving and beloved! What magic in those simple words. What untold joys did they not unfold!

For one brief moment she let her fancy stray thus.

Then between her and her tempter came the remembrance of the chivalrous gentleman who had made her his wife, and whose honest, faithful heart would break should he learn that the woman he loved and trusted had betrayed him.

How different had his conduct been from that of his nephew, who was trying to lead her into sin.

No, in that one moment she could see the moral beauty of her elderly husband, and the hideous mental deformity of her handsome companion.

She saw, too, the precipice on which she had been unconsciously standing, and a shuddering loathing horror of herself took possession of her.

Could it be true that she had unknowingly been learning to love this moral leper, whose touch meant pollution to her!—have even, though unconsciously, failed in her duty to the man to whom she owed everything?

This thought gave her courage. In that moment of danger and temptation her heart turned to the husband who had never yet failed her in word or deed. She was nearer loving him than she had even been before, now that Vincent's mad, criminal folly might be the cause of her losing his love and protection.

Wrenching herself free from Morgan's clasp, though in so doing she caused the frail skiff to oscillate dangerously, she turned upon him with flashing eyes.

"You are insulting!" she cried, with heaving chest. "Take the oars at once, and return to our party."

Vincent was slightly taken aback. He had

made so sure of her love, but he was not going to give up the prize without a struggle.

"And lose my opportunity. No, no!" he said. "You are in my power, and you shall hear what I have to say. You are married to an old man you do not—cannot love. I know that you married him for money. Such marriages are unhallowed."

"Stop, Mr. Morgan. I will not hear such words from you," broke in Adelaide, indignantly.

"You must; you cannot help yourself. Dare you deny that you love me? Have I not seen your cheek flushed and pale, the light flash into your eyes when I draw near? Can you deny this?"

Adelaide felt this was true. She had experienced an unwanted feeling of pleasure in his society. But shame that this should have been so, and loyalty to her absent husband made her exclaim, hotly,—

"You are unmanly! You insult me!"

"I did not mean to anger you. Adelaide, you must know, you must have seen my love!"

"I—I thought Ethelind," stammered Mr. Bruton's wife, scarcely knowing what she was saying. "You—she—her father."

"Ethelind! You thought I was in love with her! Is that what you would say? You cannot deceive me. You know she was not the attraction that drew me to Elavaston-place!"

"The child loves you."

"Bah! What does a child like that know of the master-passion? I tell you, Adelaide, I love you, and you shall be mine! Do not speak to me of that old man. Is it likely that you, in your youth and peerless beauty, could care for that old dotard who, in his selfishness, sacrificed you? No, I am your other self. You cannot resist your fate. You will be mine because—you love me!" and he attempted to press a kiss upon her lips.

But Adelaide was thoroughly aroused now by his dastardly conduct. Pushing him away violently she cried, with her voice quivering with the scorn she felt,—

"Love you? Do you think your conduct is calculated to inspire affection? No! I thought you were an honourable gentleman. I own I liked your society, but you have taught me today to see you as you are, and to despise you accordingly. True, you are young, handsome, outwardly well-favoured, while the dotard, as you call him, is elderly, plain, and insignificant in appearance; but when I contrast your natures, when I see you as you are, know, that were I free, free to bestow my hand and heart where I chose, my choice would fall—not upon you, as in the egotism of your heart you deem would be the only thing possible—but upon the noble, honest man who has given me his name, and surrounded me with every care that his affection could devise, who has raised me to the highest pinnacle in his esteem, from which you would cast me down to drag me through the mire for your own base ends. Selfish! Good heavens! where does this selfishness lie? Not with him, my noble-hearted husband! I thank you, Vincent Morgan, for one thing. You have opened my eyes to the fact that George Bruton is in every way your superior; that, in fact, he deserves, and shall have—my love!"

The bitter, scathing words poured in a torrent from her lips, overwhelming with confusion the man at her side.

The revulsion of her feelings and the humiliation she endured at his hands, the scorn and loathing that she felt for herself and for him made her hard and bitter, and Vincent shrank beneath the lash of her words, silent and unable to defend himself from what he knew he deserved.

"You—you do not love me!" he gasped at last, when the torrent of her words had ceased.

"I have told you, I hate and despise you. Now"—controlling herself by a powerful effort—"will you turn the boat back? Our guests will miss us."

"Let them. What do I care!" he said, recklessly.

"But I insist on your taking the oars. I can-

not row myself, or I would not be dependent on you for even so much. Do not give me cause for thinking still worse of you," Adelaide added, beginning to be alarmed at Vincent's wild demeanour.

"You may insist as much as you like, but I am master of the situation, and I will not return till I choose," he said, doggedly.

"Be reasonable!" Adelaide pleaded, now thoroughly alarmed. "What will be thought of our absence? Return at once before we are missed."

"Ah!" he laughed, widely. "They will think that we have—" Before he could finish the sentence there was a crash, a shock, and they were both struggling in the water, while something loomed darkly over them.

CHAPTER IV.

MEANWHILE the picnic party began to think of returning homewards.

When they had all assembled it was found that Vincent, Adelaide, and one of the boats were missing.

It was at first thought that they had gone for a short row, and would soon return; but as time went on, and they did not appear, the guests began to be alarmed, and went in parties to search for them, but without result, and finally they were obliged to return.

Mr. Bruton was in a terrible state of mind at the absence of his darling.

He feared some accident had occurred. He imagined what was pretty near the truth, that allured by the beauty of the day and the rippling charm of the water, Vincent had persuaded Adelaide to go for a row with him, and something must have befallen them, or they would have returned ere this.

Mr. Bruton was right in this theory that an accident had happened; but he was far from imagining the scene that had taken place between Adelaide and Vincent before they were both precipitated into the water.

Mr. Bruton hurried home in the faint hope that the missing couple might have arrived there before him; but as nothing had been heard of them in Elavaston-place, he immediately went to the police-station and invoked the aid of the guardians of the peace in organizing a search.

Vincent and Adelaide had been so much engrossed with the stormy scenes enacting between them, that neither had paid any attention to the boat, which went on lazily drifting at its own sweet will.

In rounding a bend in the river, a steam-launch, swiftly cleaving the water, was upon them before there was even time to cry out.

It dashed right into their skiff, cutting it in two and throwing the occupants into the water.

Adelaide could not swim, but for a short time her light clothes buoyed her up and kept her from sinking as she had the nerve to remain still, knowing that struggles would only cause her to go under.

Vincent sank under the water dizzy and confused, but instinctively struck out, and, rising to the surface, swam slowly and laboriously to where Adelaide was floating.

"I will save you, if possible. My mad folly is the cause of this," he said, faintly, as he grasped her with one hand. "Keep quiet, and we shall soon be on dry land."

He struck out for the shore, but had gone a very short distance when his strokes became feebler and feebler. He felt his strength failing. He still struggled and Adelaide could hear his breath coming in heavy gasps. Then suddenly he sank, still clasping her tightly. There was a rushing sound in her ears as they went down—down. The dark waters closed over her head, and then she knew no more.

When she recovered consciousness she could not at first understand where she was, nor why there was a noise that sounded like the rapping of hammers.

She opened her eyes slowly and languidly, and gazed around wonderingly. At length it dawned upon her that she must be in the cabin of a

vessel. She could plainly hear the wash of the water up against the sides of the launch as they passed swiftly through it.

Then she suddenly remembered everything. They had been nearly drowned. Vincent, where was he? and she raised herself up on her elbow the better to look around.

"That is right, young lady," said a gruff, but not unkindly voice. "I thought you would soon come to. Here, drink this. It'll help to keep the cold out," and Adelaide felt something hot, sweet and strong, placed to her lips. Obediently she drank some of it, for her teeth were chattering, and her wet clothes were clinging to her figure.

"Where am I?" was her first question.

"This here's the steam-launch *Gladfly*, which I'm sorry to say cut down your boat. We came upon you so quick-like round the bend in the river, we never saw you till you were in the water. It was quite an accident; we could not help it. But the master, he's not aboard; he will be wild when he hears it, because he's so careful, but it wasn't our fault."

"Where is Vincent?" said Adelaide, cutting short the old man's rather garrulous explanation.

"If it's the gentleman you mean he's here aboard," he returned very gravely.

"Oh! Heaven, he is not drowned!" she cried, alarmed at the man's manner.

"No, no miss, don't you put yourself out; he's not drowned, but he's got a nasty cut on the head."

"But how did it occur?"

"Well, you see, miss, I suppose the launch must have struck him; but here we are at the landing-place. We can soon get a doctor for him."

But this was not an easy matter, and finally Adelaide thought it was better to drive to the station at once rather than lose any more time.

Two of the men from the launch offered to accompany her, an offer she gratefully accepted, for alone she would not have been able to manage the unconscious man.

In after years Mrs. Bruton never forgot that dreadful journey home, wet through, and shivering, with Vincent's ghastly, bloodstained face opposite to her as he was carefully supported by one of the men; and had it not been for the care of the old skipper, who insisted on her taking hot spirits and water, and then enveloped her in warm rugs, she would have been in a far worse plight, and might have contracted a fatal chill. But at last it was ended, Elavaston-place was reached, and Adelaide was clasped in her husband's arms with a warmth that told her how true his love was as he incoherently thanked Heaven for restoring his treasure unharmed, while Vincent's senseless body was carried into the house by the two men.

* * *

Once more Christmas had come round! Adelaide and Ethelind were very busy decorating the rooms and preparing for guests, for a large ball was to be held that evening in Mr. Bruton's house.

There was a happy smile on Ethelind's face, and she sang about the room like a veritable fairy. Adelaide half sighed as she watched her. The young girl was so good and true, so happy in her undiluted love for her handsome cousin, that her stepmother could not help regretting that her affection had not been bestowed upon some one better able to appreciate its value than the man who had been so wildly infatuated about herself; but she would not breathe a word of this either to Mr. Bruton or his daughter. She could only hope that everything would turn out for the best.

It was over four months since the accident to the boat. For six weeks Vincent's life had hovered in the balance, for the injury to his head had been very severe. He was carefully tended by the woman he loved so madly and had so cruelly insulted, and by the girl who had given him the whole of her innocent heart, and finally their efforts were rewarded by his convalescence.

Adelaide had debated in her own mind whether she should tell her husband of his nephew's

mad infatuation, but finally she had decided in the negative. Mr. Bruton was so perfectly unconscious that it seemed a pity to disturb his serenity, and then there was another consideration—her stepdaughter. The child's life and happiness were bound up in that of the man she loved; and were her father apprised of Vincent's conduct he would never give his consent that Ethel should marry the man who had dared to raise his eyes to herself. So, under all the circumstances, she thought it would not be wrong to keep the knowledge of that brief madness of Vincent's to herself.

Her resentment against him had died away when she saw him, as they all thought, approaching the confines of the silent land; and in one of his sensible moments she had assured him of her forgiveness, and the fact that her husband should never hear from her of his mad folly.

One day, when his recovery was somewhat advanced, Adelaide, who had been arranging some fresh flowers, was going to leave the room when he stopped her by saying,—

"Mrs. Bruton, though you have forgiven me I shall never forgive myself for my shameful conduct."

"Say no more about it," Adelaide returned, kindly. "Let it fade from your memory as it will from mine."

"Ah! you are generous. Though you may not think I'm sincere, I tell you, Mrs. Bruton, there is nothing I would not do to show my gratitude for your forbearance."

"Will you really try to please me?"

"You have only to ask; I will do anything you wish."

"If you could only think more kindly of Ethelind. She loves you with her whole heart."

"Poor child," he said, sadly. "I have no love to give her in return; and I am not worthy of a pure affection like hers. Tell me, Adelaide, would it not be a cruel wrong to marry her, knowing that she will never be more to me than she is now?"

Adelaide was silent for a moment. It was a difficult question for her to answer. Then she said, slowly,—

"But the love will come, Vincent. No one could live long with Ethel and not feel affection for her; she is so good and true. I—I did not love George when I married him, but—" and a faint flush rose to her cheek—"I do now. His goodness, his never-failing affection, has awakened a responsive echo in my heart; and it may be the same with you. You will learn to love Ethelind as she deserves."

"I shall never love again," he was going to say, but—checking himself in time, he substituted for it—"any woman. Still, if you think the child would rather have me than any other man I will marry her and strive to make her happy."

"And you will succeed. My earnest prayers will be for the happiness of you both."

The consequence of this conversation was that Vincent devoted himself to his cousin, who never perceived the want of lover-like devotion in his wooing. She gave so much herself that she was content with a very small return, and sang about the house as blithely as a lark at the contemplation of her own happiness.

The Christmas party for which Adelaide and Ethelind were preparing was great success, and many there gave a shrewd guess as to the state of affairs between Mr. Bruton's daughter and her handsome cousin, and surmised that orange blossoms and wedding favours would soon be in requisition.

When the ball was over, the guests departed, and Adelaide had retired to her own room, there came a gentle knock at the door, and Ethelind entered, still in her glittering ball-dress.

"Why, darling, you ought to be in bed! You must surely be tired after the way in which you danced. Did you enjoy yourself?" said Adelaide, as the young girl came over and knelt beside her chair.

"So much, Adelaide," she answered, softly, lifting her radiant face to her stepmother's. "I am so happy, dear. I could not go to bed without letting you know."

"Vincent has proposed, Ethel!"

"Yes; to-night he asked me to be his wife, and I have consented."

"I am very glad, dear. May you be happy in your married life, as happy as I am with your father."

"Papa," she said, suddenly. "I hope he will not object. Do you think he will, Adelaide?"

"No, dear. I think you may make your mind easy on that score. He does not often refuse you anything you have set your heart on."

"I am so delighted you think that. I half feared that he—"

"You need not have feared. Your father likes Vincent very much. I know that he approves of your choice."

At this juncture Mr. Bruton entered the room.

"What, up still?" he exclaimed, on seeing his daughter. "You will lose all your roses if you keep such hours as these. Run away now to bed, little one. To-morrow I shall have a long talk with you," and he dismissed her with a kiss.

Shortly after the wedding was celebrated with all due pomp.

Vincent Morgan was very kind and indulgent to his wife; and if he had not a very warm affection for her he never let her suspect it, neither did Ethelind ever know that her husband had once been madly in love with her stepmother.

[THE END.]

THE HEIRESS OF BEAUESERT.

CHAPTER I.

FIRST LOVE.

The castle of Beaudesert stood in grim defiance at the top of a rock, whilst the waters of the River Wyre seethed in agitated, foam-created waves at its feet. Nature had done her best with womanly tenderness to soften every harsh outline—hanging graceful wreaths of virginian creeper or climbing roses on the stately grey towers, and filling every crevice of the rock with soft mosses, feathery ferns, or the roots of silvery beeches, whose delicate leaves shimmered in the summer sunshine.

It was the month of roses, and every nook in the garden was filled with glowing blossoms. Here they clung to the ground as if loth to leave the embrace of mother earth, but the next moment they were found climbing over archways, peeping in at windows, or hanging from balconies like restless children who cannot be kept in order.

The Earl of Beaudesert was rather like the castle from which he took his name. Naturally of an earnest, grave disposition, he would have become stern and reserved as years went on had it not been for his only child, the Lady Valerie, who was the sunshine as well as the great anxiety of his life.

When very young he had married Valerie de Faverel, the daughter of a French marquis, who had given her life for her child, and died with her infant's first kiss on her lips.

The tenderness which the Earl had lavished on his beautiful wife was given in abundance to his little daughter; but being, as he was, a particularly sensible man, he was aware of the risk she ran of being spoilt, and, therefore, often affected a sternness of expression when talking to her or listening to her childish nonsense.

Consequently, as Valerie grew up, the adoration which she felt for her father was mixed with a certain amount of awe, and whilst in his presence she was wont to be silent and abstracted, only giving reins to her naturally lively spirits when alone with her dear old governess, Miss Beck, or with some of her younger friends.

"Valerie! Valerie! where are you?" came in a feminine, squeaky voice through the shuttered windows of the room which had once been a school-room, but now was dignified by the name of the boudoir.

As no answer was forthcoming, a head adorned with grey curls, ranged with scrupulous neatness

in front of a cap with silver-grey ribbons, was protruded through a chink of the shutters, and the cry repeated. Presently a light step was heard on the gravel; a girl's form, slim and graceful as a fawn's, appeared in the dazzling sunshine, and a handful of roses was thrown into the old lady's lap as the shutter was drawn back by an eager hand.

"Are they not beauties, you dear old Becky? I am going to wear them to-night! Nothing false or artificial shall there be about me! Other girls shall be befooled and befooled up to their chins—"

"I am afraid that is not the fashion," interrupting her ci-devant pupil with a demure smile. "Well, not up to their chins, perhaps, but just as far as they like, whilst I go in for sweet simplicity. Do you think I can stand it?" with a laughing glance at a mirror.

"I think if you stand there any longer in the sun you will have such a headache that, instead of simplicity in a ball-dress, you will have something still simpler in the shape of a dressing-gown."

"Not I. I wouldn't have a headache to-day for anything," stepping inside and gathering up her flowers with tender care. "I must look my best, because that conceited little ape, Flossy Springold, will be there, and I am sure she means to carry all before her."

"And if she should; would it matter much?" with a grave mouth and twinkling eyes.

"Yes, Becky, dear, I should cut my throat," with intense earnestness.

Taking no notice of this alarming assertion, Miss Beck quietly knitted another row of her stocking before she resumed the conversation.

"Would you care to go on as she does, flirting with every man she comes across, till there is not one who really respects her, not one who does not laugh at her behind her back?"

"They are civil enough to her face," with a scornful curl of her pretty lip.

Then she went upstairs, with the roses in her hand and a thoughtful expression in her eyes.

Slowly she walked down the gallery—where the portraits of her ancestors looked down on their fairest descendant as she passed—and, entering a large room, beautifully furnished, closed the door behind her, and leaning out of the window, looked dreamily at the lovely prospect before her.

But Lady Valerie de Montfort saw neither the silvery leaves of the beech-covered slope nor the waters of the Wyre twinkling like flakes of gold between the feathery branches, for she was looking into the future of her own young life, and the confidence of youth brought back the smile to her lips.

Hitherto fortune had given her all that mortal could desire—riches, noble birth, perfect health, that treacherous gift of beauty, a kind and affectionate father, everything except a mother's love.

And the day was coming when the loss of that loving protection, which appears to belong to a child of right, would make every other blessing seem worthless, and cast a shadow over the sunshine of her young life's summer. She would cry aloud for a mother's help, a mother's word of advice, but there would never be an answer to the girl's appealing cry, except from the clouds above.

Valerie was neither dark nor fair, neither tall nor short. Her hair was like an autumn wood in the midday sun, her eyes like the same, with the shadows and the lights intensified as the dark curling lashes were raised or lowered.

It was a face that won your heart at the first glance, and kept it by the charm of its truth and sweetness.

Everyone in the parish was devoted to her, from little Jim, who delighted in running out to open the side-gate in the park whenever the dark chestnut came in sight; to Mr. Winter, the white-haired rector, who had held her in his arms at the font, and read the burial-service over her lovely young mother but a few weeks afterwards.

The dogs nearly knocked her down with their boisterous welcome when her step was heard in the stables; the horses poked their heads out of

their stalls and neighed an eager greeting ; the deer in the park left off browsing the tenderest tufts of fern in order to be fed out of her small white hand ; and every winter a crowd of hungry birds fluttered down on to the sill of the breakfast-room window to pick up the crumbs, which she never forgot to provide them with.

She was surrounded by love on every side—love, rich and full as the sunshine of Heaven, and yet Lady Valerie de Montfort was not quite content.

A loving parent, affectionate friends, devoted servants and dependents, all this was not enough for her, as the man who, in spite of great riches in the shape of flocks and herds, coveted the poor man's one ewe-lamb ; so this young heiress of Beaudesert could not be quite happy whilst she was uncertain whether Flossie Springold, the daughter of a neighbouring baronet, had possessed herself of the love of Rex Verreker, or whether it was one day to be laid at her own small feet.

Rex Verreker, a young diplomat, of very good birth and very poor fortune, had broken as many hearts as there are days in the year ; winning them, as it were, by mistake, because of his handsome face and soft rich voice, and only throwing them away because he was obliged to, either by the exigencies of fate or for the sake of his honour.

He came to Beaudesert for a week when Lady Valerie was only sixteen years of age, and treated her with the tenderness he always showed to children. Before a few days were over her passionate young heart was his to do what he liked with, although in the pride of her maidenhood she would have died rather than confess it ; and now, on this summer's evening, when all the grand people of the county were coming to do honour to her eighteenth birthday, dukes, marquises and earls were clasped together as an uninteresting lot, whilst for the sake of a commoner she was willing to divest herself of her most treasured jewels in order to please his capricious taste by an affectation of simplicity.

"Make me look as nice as ever you can, Susan," she said, to her maid. "Oh, how I wish I could be perfectly, radiantly beautiful, if only for one night !"

The maid smiled—she was a simple country girl, who had not yet acquired the habit of paying compliments.

"Some people, my lady, would say you were well enough as you are."

"Some people are content with anything," with a slightly impatient sigh. "If I were only as fair as Miss Springold I could be content, too."

"And make all this beautiful hair look as if its colour had been washed out in soda," touching the silky curls which were hanging in exquisite disorder over her mistress's shoulder.

"No, make it look like real gold, such as artists love," with a dreamy smile.

"Mrs. Ashton gave Mr. Verreker a better room than the Marquis, my lady ; because she says, he's a real gentleman down to the ground. And so he is," with grave conviction. "I met him coming along the corridor. 'Good evening, Susan,' he says, quite pleasantly, 'the dear old place is looking as charming as ever,' and then goes on to his room, but the Marquis—" she stopped, significantly.

Valerie smiled, but asked no questions, not caring to hear any gossip about her guests.

When her toilette was ended she looked at her own reflection, and her heart bounded with delight. Her only ornament besides her roses, which she had gathered with her own hand, was a diamond star, which glistened with a thousand exquisite lights amongst the curls of her soft brown hair.

Susan could not suppress an exclamation of admiration, as her young mistress passed out of the room and down the long corridor, in all the glory of her innocence and beauty, on the way to meet the fate which was waiting for her on the threshold.

CHAPTER II.

HER FIRST BALL

Two men were lounging in opposite corners of a smoking carriage in the express train to Beaudesert.

One was fat, fair, short, and commonplace, with an appearance of wealth, indifferent breeding, and intense self-satisfaction about him ; whilst the other differed from him as night from day. There was something peculiarly aristocratic in the carriage of his head and the cut of his delicately-chiselled features, but what struck a casual observer most was the expression of his eyes. Usually rather dreamy and abstracted ; every now and then when they fixed themselves on an individual who seemed to possess a particular interest for their owner, the pupils dilated to an extraordinary size, and a strange, almost unearthly radiance seemed to emanate from them.

By his own most private friends he was given the undesirable nickname of the "Evil eye," but in ordinary life he called himself Colonel Darrell, late of the 17th Lancers.

"How high do you put the figure, Marshall ?" he inquired, as he pulled another cigarette from the case in his pocket.

"Twenty thou—not a penny less," said Lord Marshall, laconically.

"Twenty thou—only that ! I thought the governor was a millionaire, and the girl an only child," in a tone of disappointment.

"Twenty thou a year, man ! It would take the Bank of England to content you !"

"Ah, that makes a difference ; but, of course, she's booked. Prizes like that don't fall into the hands of the first man who comes."

"Not exactly ; but the old fellow wouldn't hear of any engagement until after her eighteenth birthday. To-day she's free, but I'll bet you any money that by this time to-morrow Bruin has popped and been accepted."

"And may I ask who Bruin is ?" with a slightly supercilious smile.

"Bruin, confound him, is an utter cad ; but he goes down with the women-folk because he happens to be the Marquis of Dalnires, and with the men because he always knows the best tip for the Derby."

"Dalnires ! I shall remember that. Anyone else in the field ?"

"Yes ; they say that Westraven has his eye on her, and Portal ; in fact, a whole heap of fellows. By Jove ! if I weren't already booked I would go in for her myself."

"And I Should I have a chance ?"

Lord Marshall looked up and whistled.

"Don't want to be rude, old chappie ; but the game flies rather too high. Nothing under a duke or a prince of the blood royal will suit Lady Val's books."

"Her name isn't Valentine !" with an expression of alarm.

"No, no Christmas-card ; but it's something Frenchified—forget what, exactly. Here we are. Open the door, you fool ! Don't you see we want to get out ?"—to the guard.

"Humph !" said Colonel Darrell, looking round with his contemptuous smile. "Half the peerage seems to be tumbling out on to the platform !"

Whether half the peerage were there or not there was plenty of room for any number of guests in the carriages which had been sent down from the Castle to meet them.

All the way to Beaudesert Colonel Darrell said little, but it is possible he thought the more, as his dark eyes roved from side to side, taking in the beauty of the scene around, and whilst only seeming to admire its beauties measuring the value of park and timber. He would be a lucky man who won the heiress of all this wealth ; and if Fortune would only be kind to him for once there was no reason why Louis Darrell should not be the winner as well as anyone else.

He knew himself to be possessed of a nameless power, which could attract or repel as he chose, according to his wish ; and if he decided to use it on this girl, the daughter of his father's

enemy, the Earl of Beaudesert, was there either fiend or angel which could save her from his spell ?

Without any fixed purpose he dressed himself with especial care that evening, but avoided the appearance of too much preparation by omitting to put a flower in his coat. He and his fellow-travellers dined together in a smaller dining-room, as the usual dinner-hour was long past when they arrived. The band had already struck up when they made their appearance at the door of the ballroom—a group of black figures waiting to be noticed.

Lady Valerie cast a shy glance in their direction, and then at a sign from her father dropped Rex Verreker's arm, and advanced gracefully to meet them.

Colonel Darrell bowed low over the small white-gloved hand, and retaining it half an instant longer than was necessary, fixed his eyes on its owner's lovely face.

"Surely, we have met before, Lady Valerie ?"

She looked up at him in startled inquiry.

"I don't think so."

"In a former existence, if not in this."

"As to that I really cannot say," turning away from him with a light laugh.

"What did that fellow say to you ?" asked Verreker, as he regained possession of his partner.

"That we had met before."

"I could take my oath you haven't," looking as fierce as if Darrell had claimed relationship at least. "He only came from Italy three weeks ago. There was a row about him in Florence last winter ; the people took it into their heads that he had the Evil eye, and was possessed of Satan besides ; but I'll tell you the rest presently, when this waltz is over. It is far too good to lose."

They threaded their way through the maze of the dancers, followed by the eyes of all those who preferred to play the part of lookers-on, and of all the pretty girls in that brilliantly-lighted room not one was to be compared to the Earl's only daughter.

(Continued on page 376.)

CLIFFE COURT.

—10—

CHAPTER XXVII.

SIR ASCOT CARLYON did not pay his promised visit to his wife, having quite enough to occupy his time in paying off sundry debts with the proceeds of the mortgage-money, and attending Newmarket and other race-meetings, where, as it happened, ill-luck again attended him.

The thought of Alfie in her gloomy prison was not a pleasant one, and he did his best to banish it from his mind ; but, in spite of his efforts, it was not to be got rid of so easily. It had an unpleasant way of cropping up at odd moments, which was decidedly inconvenient, but which, like many other inconvenient things, had to be put up with as gracefully as may be.

Then another trouble came upon him—an accident befell his little boy, and he was hastily summoned to Bournemouth, where little Douglas lay insensible.

It seemed that the child had been left alone in the nursery for a few minutes, and during the nurse's absence had somehow contrived to pull the guard from the fire, and set himself alight.

When the servant came running into the room, attracted by his cries, she found him all afame ; and although she managed to extinguish the flames almost immediately, she was not in time to prevent his being fatally injured.

From the first the doctor gave no hope of his recovery, and while Sir Ascot sat at his bedside debated with himself whether he should send for Alfie or not, and finally decided in the negative. Her presence could not possibly affect the result,

and it was probable that when she found her child dead her anger against her husband would be increased tenfold, and there would be nothing to restrain her from acting as she had threatened. Taking all this into consideration, therefore, it was better she should be kept in ignorance of the truth.

He had not long to wait before the end came, and the poor little lad breathed his last while his father watched by his bedside, more sorrow-stricken by the event than might have been expected from a man of his callous nature.

Truth to tell, he had cared more for his son than for any other living creature; and when he went, and thus broke the last tie that had bound him to Alcila, the thought of his wife became doubly repugnant to him, and he began to regard her as a hated obstacle in his path to success.

He had seen Lady De Roubal for a little while as she passed through London, and the power of her loveliness was certainly not lessened by the thought of her splendid fortune. As much as he could be in love with anyone he was in love with her—that is to say, her beauty was of that type that he most admired, and it had taken captive his senses. How long the infatuation would last was quite another question, but at present he was assuredly under its influence.

"If it were not for Alicia I might marry her!" he muttered to himself, while he was walking home from the sumptuously-furnished apartments the Countess was occupying in one of the best London hotels. "I don't think she would refuse me, and with her fortune I should never know what it was to be pressed for money. I wish my wife would die!"

As time went on the wish became intensified, and, it may be, visions of the damp, lonely house, with the marsh lands about it, suggested that, in the case of a person of such delicate health as Alicia, the wish was not unlikely of fulfilment. He broke open the letters sent by Doctor Felton very eagerly; but although they said Lady Carlyon was far from well, there was no hint of her health being such as to give rise to anxiety, and the Baronet would throw them into the fire with an impatient sigh—sometimes a muttered oath.

At last, as October passed away and November came, it struck him that it would be polite to go down and see her, and, accordingly, he went to Paddington, and took a ticket to the nearest station to Dr. Felton's house.

The afternoon was not a pleasant one, for although it did not rain the skies were low and threatening, and there was a thunderous closeness in the atmosphere. Perhaps it was owing to this that the Baronet was attacked by a bad headache, which induced him to jump out of the train at one of the stations, and go into the refreshment-room for a brandy-and-soda. When he had finished it, and went on the platform again, he was just in time to see the train steaming gantly out of the station.

"What the deuce did you mean by telling me we should stay here five minutes?" he exclaimed, catching hold of an unfortunate porter whom he recognised as having given him the information referred to.

"So the train did stay five minutes, sir—you was longer in the refreshment-room than you was aware of," responded that individual with a grin; and it was useless to inquire into the truth of his statement, for nothing could alter the fact that Sir Ascot was midway between London and his destination, and that the train had gone.

"What time is the next one?" he inquired, with as much equanimity as he could command.

"Five-thirty-five, sir—two hours' time."

The result of this was that he did not get to his journey's end until rather late in the evening, and then he found himself at a very small station, very dimly lighted, and about as lively as a churchyard.

"Is there any chance of getting a cab?" he inquired of the station-master, who shook his head and looked dubious.

"I'm afraid not, sir. You see cabs only come from W—when they are ordered, and that's a good two miles away."

"And how far is Dr. Felton's house?"
The station-master pondered.

"About three mile and a half, I should say, sir, more or less. But it's a mortal dark road, and very lonesome."

"I don't mind that," observed the Baronet, with whom, to do him justice, physical terror was not a failing.

"There's a shorter path through the fields and across the river," went on the station-master; "it's pretty direct, and I don't think you're likely to lose your way if you follow my directions."

He told him the route as succinctly as possible; and then the Baronet started, very much put out at the idea of arriving at Dr. Felton's at so late an hour, but having no other alternative left him.

It was a dark night, there being no moon; what little light there was came from the stars, and these were frequently obscured by drifting clouds; but, as the station-master had said, the road was pretty straight, and there was not much danger of Sir Ascot's missing it.

It happened on that particular day that Lady Carlyon was alone all the afternoon, for Robson had a bad bilious attack, which obliged her to go to bed.

Alicia was rather more restless and excitable than usual, for an event had occurred the week before that had had a considerable effect on her—noting more or less than the sight of Arline in the garden, where she had gone to recall the dog.

What brought the young girl there Alicia could not imagine, being, of course, ignorant of the events that had taken place since her incarceration; but without waiting to argue out that point, she at once jumped to the conclusion that her friend must be living somewhere in the neighbourhood, and therefore there was a chance of her helping her to escape. It was with this idea she had waved her handkerchief; but, as we have seen, Arline was unable to understand the signal, and Alicia could not show her face because of the presence of Robson, who had instantly withdrawn her from the window.

Nevertheless, the fancy—for of course she was by no means sure that Arline was not paying a passing visit to the neighbourhood—gave her some encouragement, and she pondered over the means of effecting an escape with more hope than she had hitherto allowed herself to feel.

The continued absence of her husband was an assurance that he had not repented his harsh measures; and, indeed, she knew his character too well to imagine such a thing at all likely until she had given the assurance he required, and that she was firmly resolved not to do.

Of course she was quite aware that the longer she stayed in Dr. Felton's care the fewer became her chances of leaving it. He would naturally be unwilling to part with a well-paying patient; and, on the other hand, her own friends—the few she had—would, by her continued absence, gradually have the remembrance of her effaced from their minds, and leave off any efforts they might at present be making on her behalf.

Her delight when she heard that Robson was unwell, and therefore not able to be with her, was unbounded; but she restrained herself from giving it expression while Dr. Felton was in the room, and he departed, leaving her, as he fancied, as apathetic as usual, and, of course, locking the door after him.

Directly his footsteps died away Alicia sprang up and rushed to the window, the upper part of which she examined by getting on a chair. Like the lower half, it was frosted; but, unlike that, there were no bars across, for it was so far from the ground that no fears had been entertained of patients attempting to escape, and the bars had been placed at the bottom, less with that idea than the one of preventing their looking out and attracting attention from anyone who might be in the garden.

As has before been mentioned, a huge cedar spread its boughs quite close to the house, and it

was this circumstance that had induced Lady Carlyon to fancy she might possibly get away by making use of the branches in aiding her descent.

Her plan was to pull down the upper half of the sash, mount the ledge, and then spring forward and catch hold of a bough. This done, she would have very little difficulty in reaching the ground, for she was light and agile as a young squirrel, and when she was at school had excelled at all gymnastic feats.

That it was a great risk she knew, for if she failed to grasp the cedar there would be nothing to break her fall, and she must come down on the stones below—a distance of over forty feet.

"Never mind!" she exclaimed, under her breath, as this alternative presented itself. "The gods help those who help themselves, and unless I make an effort on my own behalf I may stay here for the rest of my life. Anything—death itself, is better than that!"

She measured the distance with her eyes, and calculated, as well as she could, the amount of strength requisite to accomplish it. Then she sat down and waited until it should grow dark enough to put her plan into execution.

At a little before six a servant came in with some tea, and was proceeding to light the lamp when Lady Carlyon prevented her.

"I have a headache," she said, "and it will rest my eyes to be in the dark."

The attendant made no remark, but obeyed her request, and then left; and Alicia still sat on in the darkness of the winter evening, close to the window, her watch in her lap, and her eyes strained in the endeavour to follow the progress of the hands and see how the minutes slipped by.

They went slowly enough—each one weighted with the burden of an intolerable anxiety. She heard the stable clock strike seven, and the space between that and the next hour seemed incredible.

The short November afternoon had long before drawn to a close, and now a few stars had come out and shone with a faint, uncertain radiance in the lowering sky.

Alicia watched them anxiously—their light had never been so unwelcome; the darker it was the better her chance of success.

By-and-by she saw a brougham drive up to the door, and then came the sound of Dr. Felton's voice as he stepped into it. He was going out to dinner, and was telling the coachman what time he expected he should be ready to come back.

Alicia listened with straining ears, and caught the words "eleven o'clock." She breathed a deep sigh of thankfulness. Fate seemed to favour her, for she knew if the master of the house was out the servants would take advantage of his absence, and probably relax the vigilance of their watch on its inmates.

The brougham rolled away, and the gardener closed and locked the great iron gates as it passed through. Then came a long interval of silence, and nine o'clock boomed out on the dull, damp air.

Alicia rose at the sound and listened to make sure no one was about. Then she got on the chair and cautiously lowered the sash. Just as she did so she heard a key grate in the lock, and her heart sank like lead in her bosom as she sprang down and rapidly crossed over to the couch, on which she threw herself. She had not time to close the window, for the noise would have attracted attention, and her plan might thus have been suspected and frustrated.

She had barely time to reach the sofa, and feign slumber, before Robson entered, stumbling as she came in, for it was quite dark, and she had not brought a light with her.

"I am here," said Lady Carlyon, in answer to her inquiry, and when Robson had lighted a candle, she added, "I thought you were ill in bed!"

"Yes, but I felt better and got up. It's struck me that as Dr. Felton was out and the house all at sixes and sevens, they might forget to bring you your supper," replied the woman, who was most scrupulous in the performance of her duties. "Have you had anything to eat?"

"Not since tea."

"As I thought! I suppose you'll have your bread and milk?"

"No, for I am not hungry. I require nothing."

"Then you had better go to bed while I am here to light you," observed Robson, and Alicia had no alternative but to obey. As she was dressing Robson looked round. "It seems to me there's a draught from somewhere. I can feel the cold air blowing in."

"It is through that pane of glass that was broken the other day," rejoined her mistress, hastily, and in fear lest she might go into the other room and notice the window down. This, however, Robson did not trouble to do, for she was anxious to get away, and directly Lady Carlyon was in bed she withdrew, taking with her the light.

"Thank Heaven, she has gone!" breathed Alicia; as she got up and hastily proceeded to retire. She did not put on a cloak for fear of its getting in her way, and in lieu of a hat she tied a silk scarf round her head, putting a woollen one over her shoulders and tying it at the back, so as to leave her arms free.

The house was very quiet; there was not a sound to be heard within or without, and it was now nearly ten o'clock. She proceeded once more to the window—which was fortunately a wide one—and knelt on the ledge formed by the tops of the two sashes, shuddering a little as she glanced downwards.

"I should break my neck if I were to fall!" she whispered, and for a moment her courage failed her, and she involuntarily drew back. Only for a moment, though; then she gathered all her energies for one supreme effort. By holding on to the stonework she contrived to stand almost upright on the ledge; she selected the branch to which she would cling, gave one frightened glance round, sent up to Heaven an uttered cry for help, and then sprang forward into the darkness.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SIR ASCOT CARLYON was in a bad temper, annoyed at having missed his train, annoyed at the idea of arriving at Dr. Felton's so late at night, doubly annoyed at having to walk so far in the November darkness. He had not even the satisfaction of being able to vent his spleen on anyone, but was forced to "nurse his wrath to keep it warm," and curse the ill-fortune that seemed so persistently to pursue him.

"I should think there never was such an unlucky devil born as myself," he muttered, when, having drawn forth a cigar with which to solace the loneliness of his walk, he made the happy discovery that he did not possess the means of getting a light, his fuses-box being empty. "There's some man following me behind. I'll wait till he comes up, and ask him for a match."

He had to wait some time, for the man in the rear walked very slowly, and limped as though he had hurt his foot. When he came level with him the Baronet saw that he was tall, or rather would have been, but for an excessive stoop in the shoulders that considerably detracted from his height, and seemed to be the possessor of a long, ragged-looking beard. He was leaning somewhat heavily on his stick, and would have passed on without any salutation had not Sir Ascot stopped him.

"Sorry to trouble you, but if you have some matches about you I'll thank you for one," he said, and the man paused, fumbling about in his waistcoat-pocket, and finally producing a case, from which he took half-a-dozen wax matches, and passed them to the Baronet without speaking.

"Thank you," said the latter, striking one, and lighting his cigar as he spoke. "May I, in return, offer you a cigar?"

The man seemed on the point of refusing, and then apparently changed his mind, and took the offered cigar, with a few muttered and half-inarticulate words of thanks, and went on as quickly as his limp would allow.

Sir Ascot looked after him rather curiously.

"A strange customer and up to no good, I should imagine," he soliloquised. "I wonder whether he has any designs on me. If so, I fancy he'll come off second best."

Which was extremely probable, for the Baronet never went anywhere without a small revolver, which, at the present moment, was in his breast-pocket, ready for an emergency if such presented itself. Dark and solitary as was the road he did not feel in the least timid, and very soon he had passed his fellow-traveller—whose lameness had prevented him from proceeding very quickly—and was half-way towards his destination, having reached the bridge spoken of by the station-master when he was directing him. After crossing it he turned to his left, and kept close to the bank of the river, for this was the short cut to the high road, and would bring him out a very little distance from Dr. Felton's house.

It had grown darker than ever now, for clouds had drifted over the sky, obscuring the faint glitter of the stars, and the light was hardly sufficient to distinguish the outlines of the trees, until one grew accustomed to the night shadows.

Sir Ascot's eyes were as keen as an eagle's, and he had, therefore, no difficulty in keeping to the path; he could even trace the slow, dark stream of the river as it glided on its way, deep and rippled, to the far-off ocean.

The cigar had proved a solace, and his thoughts drifted into a pleasant channel than heretofore. The remembrance of Lady De Rombal came to him, and he conjured up her image before his mental vision, as she had looked when he saw her last—the Cliffs diamonds flashing round her arms, throat, and in her beautiful hair.

She was supposed to be in mourning for her uncle, but she had been unable to resist the temptation of wearing the jewels.

Suddenly Sir Ascot came to a standstill. He had heard a sound that was neither the sighing of the wind, or the cry of a bird, but which seemed to him like the quick, half-restrained exclamation of a startled woman; and, on looking round, this idea was confirmed, for he saw a shadow, darker than the rest, crouching down against a bush, as if with the desire of remaining hidden, and this shadow gradually assumed the outlines of a female figure.

"Who are you?" he asked, fancying—not unnaturally—that the woman, whoever she was, might possibly be connected with the man he had previously spoken to, and who had now disappeared.

At the sound of his voice the woman uttered a faint, strangled sort of cry, and started up—not quickly however, but slowly, and, as it seemed, painfully; and in two strides Sir Ascot had overtaken her, and laid a heavy hand on her shoulder.

"Can't you speak when you are spoken to?" he said, looking round to assure himself there was no one near—for he had begun to fancy his footsteps had been dogged, and that, perhaps, a robbery of his watch, and the few other articles of value about his person, was contemplated. "Surely you are able to answer a civil question?" If she was able she did not choose to do so, for she maintained a rigid silence, and turned away her head with a low moan when she saw that her efforts to release herself were unavailing.

Still holding her with the one hand, Sir Ascot struck a match with the other, and held it so that it should fall on her features, and then he saw that the woman was none other than his wife!

Yes, it was Alicia, her hands torn and bleeding from her desperate efforts to clutch at the branches of the cedar. Her spring had been only partially successful, for she had not contrived to catch hold of the bough she had calculated on reaching, but had fallen, and caught at one lower down. How she reached the ground she never afterwards knew. Desperation must have lent her a diabolical strength, by whose aid she managed to climb the high wall that surrounded the garden and then let herself down on the other side by means of her scarf, which she took from her shoulders and tied to one of the iron spikes.

It was not long enough to reach more than half way down, so she had to fall the other half,

and in doing so she hurt her foot, but this did not prevent her from making her way along the high road, although each step she took became more painful; and at last, fearful of meeting anyone and being questioned, she turned down the path by the side of the river, where she fancied there would be no chance of seeing another pedestrian.

This idea proved fallacious, for she had not gone very far before she met Sir Ascot, and although the darkness prevented her from recognising him she was in so nervous and excitable a condition that she could not stifle the cry of alarm which involuntarily rose to her lips, and which he heard.

At the sound of his voice a very anguish of despair seized her, knowing as she did that her last chance of escape had gone, and although she tried her best to get from him it was with no real hope of doing so—hope, indeed, had deserted her the moment she knew who he was.

Sir Ascot immediately realised the situation, and his grasp tightened on her arm.

"So it is you!" he exclaimed, a ring of triumph in his voice. "What, if I may ask, brings you in a lonely place like this at such a time of night?"

She did not reply, but sank down on the wet ground at his feet.

"I think I understand," he went on. "You have contrived to elude Dr. Felton's vigilance, and have escaped without his knowledge. It is lucky for me chance threw you in my way. I must warn the doctor that in future he must take greater care of you."

"Shall you send me back, then?" she asked, in dull, spiritless tones, that were sufficiently indicative of her state of mind.

"Most certainly. Did you think it likely I should take you to the Chase?"

"I did not know. What means have I of telling what you purpose doing with me?"

For some moments neither of them spoke; she, crouching on the damp grass, simply waited, while a strange chaos of thought surged in his brain, as he felt how completely she was in his power.

They were quite alone. On the one side the slow, dark river, on the other a small belt of fire, forming part of a plantation, with an undergrowth of brambles between; no sound disturbed the silence of the November night, except the lapping of the waters against some stones on the bank, and in this lonely and unfrequented spot the chances of their meeting anyone were nil.

There was a demon at the Baronet's side, whispering in his ear its horrible suggestion, but he made a desperate effort to shake himself free from it. Men do not resign themselves entirely to evil all at once; it is the familiarity with it which finally conquers their last struggles of resistance.

"Look here, Alicia, I'll give you a chance," he said, quickly and feverishly. "Swear to me by all you hold most sacred to say nothing of what has passed between us, and not to interfere with my management of your estates, and I'll let you return to the Chase."

"And how shall you explain my absence?" she asked, raising her head.

"Simply enough. It is already known that you are in a private lunatic asylum, and I shall say you have quite recovered from your attack and are all right again."

"And all my life I am to remain under the ban of having been insane?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I cannot help that. As things have shaped themselves, it is the least evil to be considered. It will not materially affect you."

"Will it not? I think you are mistaken, for it would shadow the whole of my life; and, moreover, what reason would there be for people to refrain from saying my son had inherited my insanity?"

"Your son, your son—always harping on your son!" exclaimed the Baronet. "That is a point you have no longer to consider, for Douglas is dead."

His voice involuntarily lowered as he made the announcement, and her quick ears instantly



SIR ASCOT FLED—THE AWFUL BRAND OF CAIN WAS ON HIS BROW.

detected the change in his tone, which carried with it a conviction his words alone might have failed in doing.

She started to her feet, panting with wildest excitement.

"Dead—Douglas dead!" she cried out, "No, no—it is false—it cannot be true! Heaven would not be so cruel to me."

"It strikes me Heaven troubles itself very little about your affairs," grimly rejoined Sir Ascot; "but, be that as it may, I am not deceiving you this time, for Douglas is really dead. Why won't you believe me?" he added, savagely; "I regret the child's death as well as you—he was my only son—"

He paused a moment, and, strange and inconsistent as it may appear when the man's character is considered, a broken sort of tremble grated in his voice. Alicia needed no more to convince her.

"My boy—my pretty boy!" she wailed out in her anguish, throwing up her hands with a gesture of wild despair. She remained silent for some minutes, then turned to him with passionate vehemence. "You have done your worst now, are you not satisfied? You have killed my child—for if he had been with me no harm would have befallen him—you have placed me under the stigma of madness for the rest of my life—you have spent my money, and gambled away my estates. What more is there left for you to do!"

He was silent—conscience stricken, it may be—under an accusation that he was powerless to deny. As for Alicia, she was beside herself—mad with pain and despair.

"I was wrong," she added, with a wild laugh; "there is something else in your power, and I know of no reason why you should hesitate at its consummation. My life is in your hands—why don't you take it?"

"Don't tempt me," he muttered, hoarsely; "let me keep my hands free from blood."

"That is a small matter when your soul is already stained with it. The worst form of

murder is not that which strangles the breath in your throat, or plunges a knife in your bosom, for the pain is short-lived, and you are quickly beyond its reach. The cruelty is when you kill all that made existence worth existing for, and condemn your victim to years of terrible remembrance, unredeemed by a vestige of hope, as you have done me. Do you think I value my life? Do you think that if it were not for the thoughts of meeting my Maker with the sin on my soul of taking the life he gave me, I would hesitate for one moment in plunging into that river and ending my misery?"

She had spoken so rapidly and so vehemently that, as she finished, she reeled backwards from pure exhaustion. There was more light now than there had been a few minutes ago, for some of the clouds had rolled away, and the stars shone out between the rifts, showing their two faces—both deadly pale, both utterly reckless, although reckless in a different fashion.

"It is easy to talk like that, but threatening to drown yourself and doing it are two different things. Your courage is not equal to your vaunts," he said, and she turned on him swiftly in reply.

"Do you know another reason that would prevent me besides the sinfulness of the deed?" she demanded. "I will tell you—it is the hope of a just vengeance. I will not give the promise you require, for my whole future life shall be devoted to the task of avenging my wrongs. You have changed my very nature—you have goaded me to desperation, and now you shall reap the fruits of what you have sown, for I swear, before Heaven"—she looked up, solemnly—"that I will not rest, night or day, till I have accomplished my object. You may take me back to Dr. Felton's, you may redouble your vigilance, strengthen your bolts and bars, do what you will, I have escaped before, and I will escape again, to expose your villainy, and punish it as it deserves. Do not despise my words as empty threats—remember, they are not the utterances of a crushed wife, but of a desperate mother—and they will be fulfilled!"

Her voice thrilled with a certain prophetic vibration that it is impossible to describe, and Sir Ascot, in spite of himself, was impressed by it. Soofer as he was, he felt that she fully meant every syllable she uttered, and more than that—she would verify her own faith by carrying them into effect.

The demon at his side hissed louder than ever, and his resistance grew fainter and fainter with each moment. He took a step forward, and seized her arm—obeying an involuntary impulse—and she struggled to free herself from the contamination of so hated a touch.

In the struggle the distance between where they stood and the river grew less, and as Sir Ascot looked down he found they were quite close to the bank.

Suddenly there rang out on the heavy air the scream of a woman in mortal peril, followed by a dull splash in the water. Then there was silence—complete, terrible.

The river rolled on, carrying its dark secret down to the ocean, and a man rushed from its bank into the blackness of the void beyond, branded with the mark that no repentance could ever wash out—that the coming years were powerless to efface—the awful brand that was seared on the brow of Cain when his brother's blood called out for vengeance!

(To be continued.)

LIFEBOUY SOAP FOR THE "ABSENT-MINDED EGGSAR"—We understand that Messrs. Lever Brothers, Limited, the well-known soapmakers of Port Sunlight, have offered, and the Secretary of State for War has accepted, five thousand tablets of Lifebuoy Royal Disinfectant Soap for the use of our troops in South Africa. The Hospital and Ambulance Department of the Canadian contingent was also supplied with Lifebuoy Soap from the Toronto Branch of Lever Brothers, Limited.



"DARLING, WHEN IS IT TO BE?" SAID DUDLEY, IN THE SOFTEST WHISPER.

WORRELL

YOUNG AND SO FAIR.

—:—
CHAPTER LII.

HUSHED IN DEATH.

HUGH MACDONALD lay on the snow-white bed in his own room, more beautiful in the last sweet sleep of death than in the pride and rich vitality of his boyhood, with the smile that came from Heaven on his lips, and the lilies that had been gathered for Sibyl's bridal strewn in profusion over his shroud. He had died the death that he had chosen, with her white arms round his neck, and her happiness secure in Dudley's hands, and he gave his thanks to Heaven with his last breath. Let no one grieve for him. As he had lived so he died—unselfish and true to the last—rejoicing in the happiness of others, and content to leave them in the enjoyment of each other's love. His own loving service was over; he had done what he could—no wonder that his end was peace.

Sibyl had torn off her wedding finery and dressed herself in the simplest black dress she could find, her tears falling so fast, meanwhile, that she could scarcely see to fasten it. Then she made Phil bring her every flower he could find. He stole up and down stairs with a sorrow-stricken face, struggling to restrain his tears, but inclined to cry like a girl.

The two friends had been chums ever since their schooldays at Eton, and Hugh had been a most excellent substitute for a brother, although jealousies had arisen between them, and the one had often expressed hot disapproval of the other. Now these paltry strife were forgotten, and the dead was only remembered as the staunchest and most generous of friends, as one who would "stick close as a brother," through good report and ill. Gently and reverently the cousins strewed the flowers till there was scarcely any space that was not covered with their exquisite blossoms; and Hugh Macdonald looked like some beautiful

young bridegroom of old, when men thought it no shame to their manhood to deck themselves with flowers like their fairer sisters.

With a shiver Sibyl's eye fell on the French marigold, and with hasty fingers she pulled it out of the wreath. Emblem of misfortune, it had already seen its curse fulfilled.

"Sibyl," said Phil, in a low, awe-struck whisper; "he doesn't look as if he were sorry."

"He was glad to go—he told me so," with a sob in her throat. "Oh, Phil! I wish I were with him!"

"Now, that's wicked. You know why he went away—would you make it all for nothing?"

"No, no, only I feel as if I should be glad now; and some day, perhaps, if I'm ever happy again, I shall be sorry!"

"Come now, I wouldn't think of that!"

"I think you ought to go," still in that low whisper which is always used in the presence of death—"you may be wanted."

Phil nodded. "Dear old fellow!" he murmured under his breath, as he bent over the bed and kissed the broad white forehead, just above the coal-black brows. Then he went softly out of the room, and down the stairs, across the silence of the hall and passages to the smoking-room, where Lord Windsor was waiting for him in doleful seclusion.

"That fellow gone yet?" pulling the cigar out of his mouth.

"No, I heard his voice in the study."

"Takes his time. Do you know, if it weren't for the noise it would make," looking half ashamed of himself, "I'd give any money to help him out with a kick."

"So would I, only it wouldn't be decent to have a row!"

"How is she?" after a pause, during which they had both been smoking energetically.

Phil shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, poor thing, she was awfully fond of him—not spoons exactly—but awfully fond. Have they told Wentworth?"

"No, he's not to be told for anything!"

"Seems to me we might be doing some good out there—nobody to see after him, feel so down in the mouth, can't keep idle."

"I never thought of it. Shall I go after Landon, and see what he says to it?"

"I'll come with you," throwing his cigar into the fire. "Feel such a fool in my London togs," looking down ruefully at his frock coat, put on in honour of the wedding.

"We can't help it!"

"No, no, of course not. Come along."

Poor Landon, who was utterly upset by the events of the morning, and had been severely tried by the effort to bear a cheerful countenance before the invalid, glad to be relieved from his watch, admitted them into the sick-room after many cautions. Dudley looked up into the Earl's face with puzzled eyes. "You're not Phil Forrester?"

"No, here's Phil—I'm Windsor. I used to be your fag at Eton, and seen you scores of times since."

"Ah, yes, Phil, I wish you would send Hugh to me; I know he's come."

Phil turned away, but Lord Windsor said quickly: "What do you want him for?"

"I want him to tell me," his breath coming short, "about the wedding. Landon says, but I can't believe him——"

"Landon's right."

"She's not?" with an eager gasp.

"No, and she never will be!" answering on the strength of his own convictions.

"But I don't understand," with a bewildered look from one to the other.

"I'll tell you;" and Phil sat down on the end of the bed, and proceeded to unfold the stratagem by which he and Lord Windsor had kept the Rev. Theodore Shaw out of his own church. The story was told without any of Phil's accustomed fun and vivacity, and not a smile curved his lip, as he described how he was got up as a coachman, the original fly-driver being made helplessly drunk—how he took his place on the box, and as soon as Mr. Shaw was safe inside Timothy Brown's

house, unharnessed the horse, and quietly rode away on its back. He had to change his things in a dreadful hurry, and got to the church as fast as he could, in order that his absence might not be noticed.

"And then!" Dudley's eager eyes fixed on his face.

"Then Macdonald came with a man called Springfield," put in Lord Windsor, as Phil began to stammer, "and they are in the library now, having it out."

"What has Springfield got to do with it?" his anxiety conquering his weakness.

"He's got something against Lushington, and—"

The door opened, and in came Lord Wentworth white and worn, and looking inclined to drop.

Phil got off the bed and pushed a chair towards him. Windsor rose, and Dudley looked at his father, literally panting for breath.

Lord Wentworth sank into the chair, as if his strength were failing fast, but knowing that all were waiting for his news, he raised his head, and said very quietly, "Major Lushington has gone, and will not trouble us again."

A light shot from the Earl's eyes, but tapping Phil on the shoulder he went softly out of the room, followed by the young subaltern.

"Thank Heaven!" murmured Dudley, as he raised himself on his elbow, and a fever flush dyed his cheeks. "This is Hugh's doing—I want to thank him too."

"Lie down, my dear fellow," said Lord Wentworth, tremblingly, "he can't come to you just yet."

The invalid's heavy head dropped back on his pillow, and a joyous smile played round his lips. "My own little Billa," he whispered, and his tired eyes closed in the sleep that comes from exhaustion.

Hugh Macdonald was laid in the vault of his ancestors, and a long train of those who had loved him followed him to his last resting-place. There was scarcely a dry eye as the service was read by the same clergyman who had officiated at his father's funeral, and the coffin was so smothered in flowers that only the edges of the purple pall were visible.

There was one little wreath conspicuous amongst the rest, because the white roses of which it were formed were scarcely kept together by the wires. It had been sent by Rose Forrester from her sick-bed, and her trembling fingers had scarcely been equal to the task; but Sibyl would not allow anyone to touch it, for there was a pathos in its untidiness that went straight to her heart. Alas! for the love that may not even follow, but is left behind in a lonely world. Lady Windsor came over to bear Sibyl company on that melancholy day, and as she drew her tear-stained face down upon her shoulder, said gently, "Don't grieve for him, dear child, he would not have been happy here—you must know that."

"But he might have changed!"

"No, a Macdonald never changes. To love once with them is to love as long as life lasts. He wanted to die—you could see it in his face—and you shouldn't grudge him his peace."

That evening Dudley Wentworth said to his father, "Hugh is dead—I know it. Oh, Heaven! if I could only have seen him once again!" Then he lay quite still for a long time, the tears trickling down his wasted cheeks, and his thoughts going back to the days when they were as brothers.

Hugh had made a will without his guardian's knowledge before he started for Egypt, and left it in the charge of Mr. Compton, the family solicitor. As he was the last of his race he could follow his own wishes without restraint as to the disposition of his property; and, as usual, he had carefully considered the happiness of others. His own inclinations would have led him to bequeath everything he had to Sibyl Fitzgerald, but he fancied that Dudley, being scrupulously sensitive as to his honour, would not have liked the idea of proposing to an heiress after he had been so impoverished by the failure of the Saratoga mine. Therefore, after remembering some old pensioners at Bramble's Peak, London, his guardian's faithful valet, and Phil Forrester, one of his oldest friends, and sundry others, he

left all the family jewels to Sibyl Fitzgerald, as a slight token of gratitude for the happiness her friendship had given him; and all the rest of his property, whether landed or in the funds, to his friend and brother, Dudley Wentworth, in the hope that he would now be able to re-enter in possession of Wentworth Chase.

shaking his head. "She has never any trust in the future."

"Then you had better come in with us."

"Thanks. Major Belfield was going to ask for a tilt, and I wouldn't deprive him of the pleasure."

"What an ass you are!" muttered the Major, angrily. "I never could get on with that she-poker!" However, he was obliged reluctantly to give up his seat to his perfidious friend, and take another opposite to the stately Judith, whose temper by this time was roused to hidden fury. That Dudley, whom she had not seen for years, should greet her as coolly as if she were an acquaintance, and then should add insult to injury by refusing the first opportunity of a chat—this was more than mortal maid could stand! It was maddening enough to see Sibyl looking so lovely in her cool white dress, and Dudley gazing at her with eyes that saw nothing else. Oh, why had she ever been sent away from Coombe Lodge, or treated in such a way as to excite Lord Wentworth's compassion? If it had not been for that, those two would never have been thrown together. And if she and Sibyl had only been given equal chances, she, with her five feet seven inches of grace and dignity, could have easily out-rivalled an insignificant chit of only five-feet-four. She fumed and fretted inwardly all the way up to the Chase, and the Major found Phil indefinitely better company than his sister.

"I never was more pleased at anything in my life than when I was told that the Wentworths were coming back to the old place," he said, heartily.

"I always knew the move was unnecessary—said so from the first." And the General pulled his tie straight.

"But I thought it was Macdonald's money!"

"That helped—of course that helped."

"I should think it did," cried Phil. "It really seemed as if the poor old fellow died on purpose to do good to others."

"What a horrid way of putting it!" said Judith, pettishly. "I am sure if I thought that I wouldn't touch a penny."

"Why not, Miss Forrester?" asked the Major, in surprise. "I always understood that Macdonald was in love with your cousin, but knowing that it was no use, broke his heart and left his money to his rival."

Judith's cheeks flamed, but her tones were ice itself. "The most absurd stories are always most easily credited. I suppose people concluded that because—because they lived under the same roof, they must have the same tastes."

"I think there must have been more than that to go upon, for Wentworth, you know, has been for ever so long in India. I was often down at the Court, so I heard all the gossip of the neighbourhood, and I can assure you my first question, whenever I came back, was always, 'Well, who has carried off the beauty?' There was Windsor, but we thought he had tried his chance and failed—Macdonald, but he was considered too young."

"And what about Major Lushington?" with a sly, impudent smile.

"Oh, we never thought that could come off—knew him too well. Wentworth was called the dark horse, and if he came over I knew he would win."

Phil was enjoying his sister's discomfiture immensely, but the General's wrath waxed hot. "Pon my soul, you give my niece a pretty character! Do you mean to say that she was the talk of the smoking room, playing fast and loose with all these men in turn?"

"Not for a moment!" in shocked surprise. "We all worshipped her most humbly at a distance. Nobody would have dared to say a word against Miss Fitzgerald. The whole county would have been made too hot to hold him."

"Humph, an arrant flirt. I always said she was."

"Some people can't help it;" with an air of superior dignity, which sent Phil's blood up to fever heat; "but I daresay she will turn over

CHAPTER LVII.

WELCOME HOME.

THE hearts of the tenants were glad when it was announced that Lord Wentworth was coming "to his own again"; and serious consultations were held as to the propriety of erecting triumphal arches across the road, and decking the trees of the avenue with bunting; but a hint was given them by Mr. Graham, the white-haired rector, who had been down to the Chestnuts to have a confidential talk with the Viscount, that festive demonstrations were to be dispensed with, although the usual dinners should be given, and everything done that would give pleasure either to young or old.

It was a lovely day in June, when crowds of people made their way along dusty roads to the station at Thornfield. There were all the farmers of the neighbourhood, most of them making a goodly show on their powerful looking horses, their wives and daughters dressed in their best, the tenants just run up from the fields in their work-day clothes, their "misseuses," with their babies in their arms, and the rest of the family clinging to their skirts. General Forrester, with his eldest daughter and Phil, were on the platform, and Mr. Graham and his wife stood by their side. As the train rushed into the station the gentlemen took off their hats, the ladies waved their handkerchiefs, whilst from the crowd outside came such a burst of cheering as one but a landlord who had been like a father to his people is likely to get in these days of independence.

It was a homely, hearty welcome that did Lord Wentworth's heart good to hear. He shook hands heartily with his friends, and reminded them that they were all coming to dine with him; but it was his own people he was thinking of as he hurried through the station, and when their ruddy faces came round him, and their voices gave him another lusty cheer, the tears rushed into his eyes, and in a hesitating voice, he faltered out a husky "Heaven bless them."

He handed Lady Windsor into the landau, then Mrs. Graham, and then got in himself, asking Mr. Graham to accompany them. Sibyl came in the next with Dudley, Lord Windsor and Major Belfield, and the Forresters followed in their own carriage.

"Can't we call for Rose?" said Sibyl, when they had distanced the crowd, and were driving down the old familiar road. "I feel as if she ought to be with us."

"Yes, why didn't she come to the station?" asked Dudley, with languid interest.

"Because she was not strong enough to bear so much fatigue, at least, so Judith says," and a happy smile played round her lips as she thought of her own meeting just now with her cousin. Judith had wreathed her face with smiles, but had shaken hands with Wentworth before she despaired to take notice of Sibyl, whilst Phil had imprisoned both hands with such true cousinly affection that she had nothing but a laughing nod to give Miss Forrester by the time she remembered her existence.

"There won't be much room for Miss Forrester," remarked Major Belfield. "Don't you think I had better get out and walk?"

"Oh, I can walk," said Lord Windsor, without showing the smallest inclination to budge.

As they drew up to the gate of Coombe Lodge the General stopped to know what they wanted.

"Only your youngest daughter, General; we thought we had better kidnap her."

"I can bring her up with her mother later on."

"That won't satisfy Miss Fitzgerald,"

a new leaf some day, when she is a little older."

"We don't want a new leaf," said Phill, fiercely. "Belfield and I are quite content, aren't we?" with a nudge of his elbow to emphasize the assertion.

"I should be sorry to see her altered in any way," very decidedly.

"Unless I could multiply her, and get one all to myself."

"Phill, you have a greater capacity for talking nonsense than anyone else," said Judith, in a tone of suppressed exasperation. "Will you look out and see if Rose is in the Wentworth's carriage?"

"Yes," leaning over the side, till he was in imminent danger of losing his balance. "Dear little soul, she looks brighter than she has done for many a day!"

"She is sure to have a headache to-morrow!"

"Some things are worth it."

"Not a heavy dinner like we are to have to-night. Good gracious, what a mob! I thought we had got rid of them all!"

The cheers of the school children burst forth as the carriages went up the avenue, and the farmers' troop of heavy cavalry, which had formed an escort to Lord Wentworth's landau, drew up on the gravel-sweep, on either side of the party. All got out of the carriages, and stood in a group on the steps, whilst Lord Wentworth, with his white hair shining in the sun, thanked them in a few simple words, "for the excessive kindness of their welcome—a kindness that he would never forget."

"Give it 'im with a three times three!" cried Farmer Benson, his jolly red face growing purple with enthusiasm, and his comrades and neighbours answered to his call with all the strength of their lungs, and the warmth of their honest English hearts. Beer and wine were sent out to them, and the healths of the old master and the young were drunk with the most fervent wishes for their happiness.

When dinner was over the evening was so warm that chairs were placed on the terrace, and coffee was brought out into the fresh, sweet air. Gradually the party broke up, and the young people scattered themselves about the gardens. Rose looking as fragile as a snowdrop, was taken in charge by Lord Windsor, who promised her mother most solemnly that under no circumstances should she divest herself of a certain woollen shawl, which he had fetched from the house on purpose for her.

Mrs. Forrester, as was her wont, grew anxious about her youngest born as soon as she was out of her sight. Sibel good-naturedly volunteered to go and look for her, whereupon Dudley, to Judith's exceeding vexation, rose from his chair, with an air of affected indifference, and supposed he must help her.

Judith said quickly, "I think it is rather chilly;" but he must have suddenly grown deaf, for he walked off at an increased pace, instead of asking her to join him, and she was left behind to ponder over her wrongs, or talk to Major Belfield, who was thinking of someone else!

CHAPTER LIV.

A DOUBLE BRIDAL.

Two people were seated in the farthest corner of the second terrace, half hidden in a bower of roses, watching the first rays of the moon steal in a silver path across the still waters of the lake. Dadley's heart was full of joy and thankfulness as a lark's sweet song when he soars towards the gates of Heaven. He was once more in the home of his forefathers, with the people whom he had known from earliest boyhood in their quiet homes in the valley at his feet, and the girl whom he had loved, "through peril and pain," standing close beside him, her little hand nestling confidingly in his.

"Darling, when is it to be?" his voice sinking into the softest whisper, as his arm drew her closer to his heart.

One shy, upward glance, and then her sweet

face was hidden on his breast. "Not yet," and she shook with fear and joy.

"I have waited with the patience of Job—I can't bear it any longer!" and his voice grew thick with passion. "All sorts of fears come over me—I must have you at once and for ever!"

Her heart throbbed fast with a delicious pain. But she could find no voice to speak.

"You must answer me. Bele, fancy if something happened and I lost you!"

Then she clung to him in a fright, and begged him to tell her if he felt ill.

"No, no, only I can't sleep at night for thinking of you. Darling, is it fair to torture me?"

"I am so afraid," her voice low and unsteady—
"I hate the thought of a wedding."

"There shall be no white satin, or anything of that kind. You shall come down just as you are—only come, that is all I ask of you!"

He raised her face gently, and put his lips to hers, whilst his own grew pale—with excessive feeling. "Good Heaven! how I love you!" with a deep-drawn sigh, as he held her close to his throbbing heart.

There was silence in that quiet corner, for hearts speak loudest when tongues are dumb; but before they left it he had wrung from her a promise that they should be married towards the end of August. And he walked back to the group on the terrace with such an air of proud possession on his handsome face that everyone knew that the day was settled. Mrs. Forrester gave an audible sigh to Judith's lost chances, and said, rather fretfully,

"Where's Rose? I thought you had gone to look for her."

"I—I quite forgot," stammered Sibel, with a vivid blush.

"Never mind," said Dudley, stealing Judith's shawl to wrap round her, as she sat down in a chair between Lord Wentworth and Lady Windsor. "I'll go and reconnoitre, but with the utmost caution."

The Countess took Sibel's hand in hers, and patted it affectionately, to show that although she was disappointed about her son, she could still rejoice in her joy. Sibel was too shy to look at anyone else, but sat quite still, with a smile of exquisite happiness hovering round her lips, and a tear gathering slowly under her long lashes. All her past and present seemed a dream. Could she be the same girl who had climbed out of her window by a ladder, and had only been saved from running away by a chance meeting with Dudley Wentworth!—the same girl who stood in a church, not so very long ago, with another bridegroom at her side, and her boy-lover dying at her feet! She shivered, and Lord Wentworth immediately proposed an adjournment to the drawing-room. It angered Judith beyond measure to see what care they all took of her cousin; and getting up from her seat, she asked her mother if it weren't time to go.

"Yes, my dear!" said Mrs. Forrester, meekly; "but I must first say good-night to Rose."

"Good-night!" in angry surprise.

Lord Wentworth had kindly insisted that she should stay with Sibel for the next few days."

Judith bit her lip. Was she to be forever put aside for her sister?

Meanwhile Lord Windsor and Rose were lingering a long time by the lake, the former having combated every proposition of returning to the house. Poor little Rose! Hugh's death had given such a shock to her frail health that had hovered for weeks between life and death. As soon as she could gather sufficient strength for the move she was taken to Brighton for change of air. There Lord Windsor had met them after his second rejection by Sibel. Feeling angry with the self-satisfied crowds, who all looked so "detectably" prosperous and happy, he was attracted by one sad little face, which seemed to belong to a being as doleful as himself. Her timid bow gave him the necessary encouragement, and for the remainder of her stay he was her daily companion. He had been longing to see her ever since, but every invitation to Berkshire was declined for her by her mother, who was afraid of the sad associations

connected with Thornfield. Now he was making the most of his opportunities, and Rose was seized with a violent desire to run away.

"I think I will go back now," she said, for the twentieth time, but he placed himself before her, and imprisoned her between the hanging boughs of a rose bush and the silvery water.

"One moment," he said, entreatingly, as he stretched out his arm over her head and picked a pretty white rosebud. He put it into her hand, and his fingers closed tightly over hers. "I have given you a rose, and I want you to give one to me."

"Certainly," surprised at his earnestness, and she looked up at the boughs above her golden head.

"Not that sort of rose, but this," and very gently his arm stole round her waist.

"Lord Windsor!" stepping back in a fright. In another moment she would have been in the water, for her foot slipped over the edge, but his arm tightened its grasp and held her safe. She fluttered like a frightened bird, whilst he beat over her trying to soothe her. "Let me go," she gasped.

"Not till you have promised to be my wife."

"I can't—I can't. Oh, why do you ask me?"

"Because I couldn't help it. I love you; 'pon my soul I do!"—he put his hand on her curls as if calming an excited child, but she shook it off. "Look here, Rose, if you don't love me now, you shall soon, I promise you. You wouldn't like to break my heart when I've just saved you from tumbling into the water. There's drawing away his arm, because he saw that it troubled her. "I've only been holding up your shawl as your mother told me to. I'll do anything you like; I'll wait a week and ask you again. Wentworth has asked me to stay."

"And me, too," under her breath.

"Jove, that's splendid! I'll ask you every day of the week, so you must give in at last."

"Please take me back!"

"He took her hands in his, and looked down at her troubled face.

"Rose, is there anyone else?"

Two tears rolled down her cheeks on to her soft, white-neck.

"I know," he said, gently. "I was fond of him too."

The blue eyes looked up into his with a grateful glance, she was so glad that he understood. He took it as a sign of encouragement, and stooping very low kissed her little hands. "We will remember him together,"—then he gave her his arm, and they walked slowly through the moonlit gardens towards the prosaic realities of life.

"Lord Windsor," very timidly, when she was protected by the group in the distance, "I must tell you I never mean to marry."

"Of course not," soothingly; "but you can't be an old maid; and I must have a wife."

"But—"

"Yes! We won't settle the day till the end of the week,"—then quickening his pace. "Mrs. Forrester, behold your daughter as carefully beshawled as when she left you."

"Yes, but how could you be so long?" with gentle reproach.

"Long! Five minutes at the outside, and the whole of that time I had my eye on that shawl."

Dudley, who had returned at a safe distance from the missing couple, touched General Forrester on the shoulder.

"Shall you be at home at twelve o'clock tomorrow morning?"

"Eh! What! Do you want to see me? Any time you like. Nothing wrong, I hope!"

"No, nothing wrong," with a quiet smile, as he helped Judith into the carriage.

"It's such a long time since you've been to the Lodge that you see papa is surprised," with a tender look up into his eyes.

"I shall come often enough after this," pressing her hand in the unwanted exuberance of his feelings.

A spasm of hope shot through her heart, for inveterate conceit had completely blinded her to the fatal truth.

"Never too often, be sure of that," with a strange softness in her usually metallic voice.

"Now, that was thoroughly nice of her," thought Dudley to himself as he went back into the house. "I did her the injustice to think she would be spiteful."

The next morning he had an opportunity of seeing how really nice she could be under adverse circumstances, and the consequence was that as he turned his back on Coombe Lodge he thought that it would be rather a long time before he crossed its threshold again. The General seemed anxious to make all the amends he could for the past. Mrs. Forrester was meek and inoffensive as usual; but Judith was like a scowling Fury, although her tongue was tied by conventional good breeding.

"Poor thing," thought Dudley, as he pulled his moustaches reflectively. "I verily believe she was fond of me after all, and I never said thank you."

Lady Windsor soon after this announced her intention of giving up her residence at the Court, and said she would like to find a place, not too far off, where she could settle down quietly. Bramble's Peak would suit exactly as to distance, and she would love to live there on account of its past associations, if Dudley did not object to parting with it. Wentworth said if she wished to have it, nothing he should like better. Hugh had especially desired him to return to his own home; the two places were rather a drag on his resources, and he could not bear to part with Bramble's Peak except to one who had known the Macdonalds, and loved them.

The matter was arranged to the satisfaction of everyone; the old tenants gained a very kind mistress, and Hugh's grave was watched over and tended by loving hands.

Lord Windsor gained his point by quiet persistency. He would not believe in Rose's gentle "no," so, to avoid an awkwardness, she had to change it into "yes," and not even Dudley Wentworth looked prouder than he did, as he stood by the side of his golden-haired bride before the altar of Wentworth church. The two cousins were married on the same fifteenth of August, and both had pleaded for an absence of wedding finery and fuss.

Lord Wentworth looked so peacefully happy as he leaned on his gold-headed stick, as if he were ready to say with Simeon, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace," and General Forrester had lost some of his sternness, as his eyes travelled from the sweet face of his niece to the beloved features of his favourite daughter. Both were young and so fair, both had floated over the sea of sorrow to the shore of true happiness at last; each had won a husband, of whose love she might be proud.

Sibyl was very pale, and so nervous that when a footstep came echoing up the aisle she shook from head to foot. Dudley, who was watching her intently, bent his head and whispered, "Only old Upperton!" and the service proceeded undisturbed by any interruption. The last words were said, and she rose from her knees with a sob of thankfulness in her throat.

Dudley kissed her before them all. "My own at last!" and his face was radiant. Lord Wentworth laid his trembling hand upon her shoulder, touched her forehead with his lips, and looking from one to the other said hoarsely, "Heaven bless you both!"

The story of Sibyl Fitzgerald is ended, and we leave her on the threshold of a brighter, happier future, feeling sure that so long as Dudley Wentworth is by her side as a strong tower of defence, sorrow, if it must come, will lose its edge, and every joy have a double sweetness.

Judith Forrester became a sour old maid. She was once engaged to a baronet, but he was so much alarmed at a sudden outburst of temper that he offered to pay any amount of damages rather than keep his engagement. The damages were not accepted, but Miss Forrester disgusted at the whole affair, retired into determined spinsterhood. Phil spent a good deal of time

with "his sister, the Countess," and developed into an averagely steady young man. The shock of Hugh's death had sobered him, and till the last day of his life he emulated his example, by his devotion to Sibyl, who he always declared had done her best to make a man of him.

[THE END.]

THE HEIRESS OF BEAUESERT.

—10—

(Continued from page 369.)

Even Flossie Springold, the acknowledged belle of the county, was biting her red lips in mortified vanity, and wondering if she had made a mistake in putting on a blue dress instead of a white one, as Rex Verreker, after the first greeting, had never looked once in her direction. Yet he had been her slave, as the saying is, at every party during the winter—a most independent slave truly, and one who gave its present owner constant anxiety lest at some unforeseen moment he might elect to declare himself free.

Still, this constant uncertainty lent a peculiar interest to his capture, and Flossie had almost come to the conclusion in her softer moments that if he asked her very much, perhaps one day she might allow herself to be called Mrs. V. Mrs. Verreker! It wouldn't sound bad; but she had always sworn she would be something infinitely higher than a Mrs.

Of course everyone in her own set said the name of Verreker, belonging as it did to one of the oldest families in England, was quite as good as any peerage; but to others, the friends of her girlhood, to whom she had imparted her childish ambitions, she foresaw that she would have to indulge in a series of ignominious explanations; and even then she would be laughed at behind her back.

If only he weren't so terribly handsome! Look at him now talking to Valerie, with that air of devotion which was sure to flatter the girl's vanity and make her think that for the moment at least he really admired her more than all the rest—more than Flossie herself, for instance, whose hair shone like gold in the light of many candles!

It was absurd and very disgusting, but she had no more time to think of it, because the Marquis of Dalntree was standing before her, making his lowest bow, and asking for the honour of that dance.

Miss Springold was engaged, but only to a young Lancer, who was at that moment making his way towards her through the crowd; but to her elastic conscience it seemed the most natural thing in the world to throw over a casual Lieutenant on the first rung of the social ladder for a nobleman who had begun at the top.

"Now tell me all you know about Colonel Darrell," said the soft voice of Lady Valerie, as she took a few minutes' rest in the conservatory later on in the evening.

"I would rather talk of something pleasanter," and Rex Verreker bent his eyes admiringly on the sweet face upturned to his. How young and innocent she looked, like a white rosebud picked in the dew! He was so tired of the fashionable women of the world, all striving to emulate each other, and willing to barter anything and everything in order to win the gratification of putting on a prettier dress than a rival—always playing a part—every natural impulse subdued—with complexions as false as their hearts, and lives as tangled as persistent coquetry could make them. His heart seemed to go out in a wave of tenderness towards this child, standing in all the serenity of her innocence on the threshold of her womanhood, with no knowledge of the dangers which might await her in the future, no suspicions of the frauds and temptations, from which neither the highest nor the best beloved can hope to be free. Who would have the right to guard her, to keep her little feet from ever being sprinkled by the fuscous spray of the river of sin, to keep her as one precious jewel

which no money could buy, and which all the gems of the earth would be powerless to replace? Not he, Rex Verreker.

"Did you say there was a story about him in Florence?"

The question roused him from his reverie, and he became conscious that he had left the former one unanswered.

"Yes, there was a story, but I can't answer for the truth of it—in fact, there were a great many. If you want to hear them I must ask you to come into the garden, for there must be no eaves-dropping."

CHAPTER III.

FIRST FEAR.

"WELL, Darrell, what do you think of her?" said Lord Marshall, laying his hand on the Colonial's shoulder.

Colonel Darrell started, and turned his glowing eyes for a moment on his friend.

"I'm mad about her," he said, quietly. "I wish to Heaven I had never come."

"For her sake or yours?"—with a satirical smile.

"For hers"—in a low tone, which was scarcely audible.

Lord Marshall laughed.

"I wouldn't trouble myself on that score. Go away to-morrow, and there will be an end of it."

"There won't be an end of it. It isn't in my power. You don't understand."

"Nonsense. I understand perfectly. You are head over ears in love, and you make as much fuss about it as if you had never liked a girl before. It has happened to me such scores of times that, 'pon my word, I take no notice of it."

Colonel Darrell's lips curled contemptuously, and for a few minutes he was lost in thought. The ball-room, with its lights and flowers, gradually vanished before his eyes, and as in a dream he seemed to be standing on a vine-covered slope, and the girl who had loved him was lying dead at his feet, with the roses that he had given her fading in her hand. She had obeyed the spell which he had cast over her half in play. And what had been the end of it? A broken heart and a broken life.

A shadow passed through his frame; and looking up abruptly he met the wondering gaze of Lady Valerie. He crossed the room at once, saying to himself,—

"She will be the next. It is fate, it is fate!"

Then he made her a low bow, and presumed that it was impossible for her to give him a dance.

She hesitated, her colour coming and going in her cheeks like sunthine in April.

"This is an extra. I am not engaged," she said, softly, "but—"

"Let there be no 'but'!"—and a gleam of joy lit up his stern features as he stole his arm round her supple waist. The next moment they had started, and the throng followed, the music growing faster and faster, till most of the dancers stopped breathless and exhausted. Colonel Darrell never halted for a moment; his cheek was as white, his breath as steady as before he began, but his pulses were beating wildly and his heart seemed as if it would burst from his bosom. To Lady Valerie it seemed as if under this man's magnetic touch she had lost all power of volition. On and on she must go, her small feet scarcely touching the ground, her whole weight supported by the arm which encircled her waist. Her head drooped like a throbining flower, her hair touched her partner's coat; an odd sensation that was neither pain nor pleasure, but a mixture of both, came over her. Scarcely conscious of anything but a queer feeling of utter powerlessness she fainted right away, but only for a moment. She was roused by the voice of Rex Verreker, who, with apparently accidental awkwardness, had got in their way, and compelled Darrell, much against his will, to stop.

"Lady Valerie!" he exclaimed, in alarm, without waiting to apologize, "are you ill?"

"I don't know," she said, faintly, as she gave a slight stagger, and looked round her with be-

wildered eyes as if she had just been roused from her sleep. "I think I want to rest."

"You are tired out," he said, wrathfully. "The idea of dancing through a whole waltz. No one but a feminine Hercules could stand it!"

"Lady Valerie, you dance without an effort. It is no exertion to you," said Davrell, ignoring Verreker completely; "but the atmosphere of the room is oppressive, and you want a breath of air to refresh you."

He was about to lead her down the steps from one of the windows into the garden, but she drew away from him with repugnance that was almost fear, and looked appealingly at Rex.

In an instant he took possession of her, declaring that the next next waltz was his, and led her away into the most retired corner of the conservatory, where he stood before her with the air of a sentinel on guard, his blue eyes flashing resentfully, his brave heart beating tumultuously at the thought of danger to the gentle young creature before him. Oh! if he only had the right to stand between her and evil for the rest of her life, not a hair of her head should be hurt.

For some time he did not speak, fancying she would like to be left quiet. From where he stood he could catch a glimpse of Flossie Springold's sunny head, as she sat on a sofa, half hidden in a bower of flowers, talking with the utmost animation to the Marquis of Daintree. His coronet evidently gave him a special beauty in her eyes, for she was looking up at him as if he were an Adonis—much as she had looked at Rex himself only a few hours before. His upper lip curled in supreme disdain. What an ignoble thing his own flirtation with the little coquette seemed to him then. Was it possible that he had made himself the plaything of an empty-headed, frivolous girl, when all his better instincts warned him against her? He could scarcely credit his own folly, but his memory stood up in judgment against him, and he knew for a fact that week after week, through snow or rain, he had ridden over to Scarsdale Park with but one object in view.

"Mr. Verreker, do you think there is any truth in mesmerism?" said Lady Valerie, her voice still tremulous with emotion.

"None whatever," he answered, confidently, "but why do you ask?"

"Because just now, when dancing with that horrid man, I felt just as if I had lost all power over myself," the colour deepening in her cheeks.

"Because you were faint and over tired," with a slight smile. "Believe me, in spite of all those stories I told you, there is nothing supernatural about him. Don't have anything to do with him; but, above all, don't be afraid of him."

"Why not?"

"Because it would stir his vanity. Won't you let me take you into the supper-room? I am sure a glass of champagne would do you good."

"No, thanks. At this time there would be nothing but gentlemen there; but if you could find a servant and ask him for a glass of water—"

"I will go myself," and he hurried off, casting a searching glance round to assure himself that Colonel Darrell was nowhere within sight. No, he was at a safe distance, and his black head was nowhere to be seen; so Valerie could be left for a minute without any danger. Although he had denied it so emphatically, Rex could not help fancying that there was a strange power in the man to which some people would be more sensitive than others, and he determined that Darrell should not come near the Lady Valerie if it were in his power to prevent it.

The supper-room was crowded, and he was stopped by several friends who had not had a chance of a word with him during the whole evening. Rex was one of the most popular men in the county—such a capital shot that the neighbouring squires were always glad to secure him for their shooting days—such a first-rate rider that he was often asked to try a new horse for a friend in a run across country; and to-day he was paying for that popularity rather more dearly than he had any idea of.

He had just torn himself from a round-faced, rosy rector, who was dying to tell him of his own experiences the day before at one of the public cricket matches, when Miss Springold tapped him on the arm with her fan, and, in a playful voice, asked him if he weren't ashamed of himself!

"Yes," he said, with a good-humoured laugh; "because I must run away from you when I would so much rather stay."

"Must run away!" raising her eyebrows in vexed surprise; "you have done nothing else all night."

"I don't care to run in couples with a man like Daintree," edging off.

"Might I have that glass of water?" seizing at the first excuse for stopping him. "I am positively dying of thirst."

"This is not in your line—simple, unadulterated water."

She laid her hand on the glass, and, much against his will, he was obliged to relinquish it.

"I like it best to-night," fixing her blue eyes with the most touching of glances on his good-looking face.

He could not resist the impulse to ask her why, but was sorry the next moment, for she answered, in a whisper,—

"Perhaps because it is the only thing I've had from you."

He blushed—positively blushed! bowed low, then, to her utter disgust, caught up another glass of water from the sideboard and disappeared. He had some difficulty in making his way through the doorway, for a dance had just ended, and the dancers, with flushed faces, were hurrying in quest of cooling drinks; but by dint of some exertion, and a good deal of snubbing to those who wanted to button-hole him, he at length reached the ball-room. Hastening across it with long strides, he came to the glass doors of the conservatory, and, in a few moments, was standing in the same corner where he had left Lady Valerie—looking blankly at the empty seat!

She was not there. A pang of disappointment shot through his heart, which was out of proportion to the occasion. Tired of waiting for him, she had evidently gone off with another partner—but why hadn't he met her on the way? Besides, she was not the sort of girl to send a man to fetch even so small a thing as a glass of water and go away without waiting to receive it. She was so considerate to all in her gentle womanhood that she would hesitate to give the smallest offence. Perhaps she was ill, and had slipped away to bed.

He met the Earl of Beaudesert—a tall, aristocratic-looking man, about fifty years of age—and asked him if he knew where his daughter was.

"No," he said, with a smile. "I saw her in the conservatory a minute ago, and she said she was waiting for you."

Rex Verreker turned away with an impatient sigh, and continued his search; but neither in the brilliantly lighted rooms nor on the terrace just outside the windows could he see either the Lady Valerie or that mysterious man, Colonel Darrell, and a vague presentiment of evil filled his heart.

CHAPTER IV. UNDER THE SPELL.

WHERE was Lady Valerie?

When Rex Verreker left her to fetch the glass of water she had leant her head against the trailing branches of a passion-flower, and, tired with the various emotions of the evening, closed her eyes. The long lashes swept the rounded cheeks, the pretty lips parted in a long-drawn breath, and a delicious feeling of wished-for repose stole softly over her. She looked a picture of Eve in the Garden of Eden—Eve before the first touch of sin had marred her bright innocence; and, to make the parallel complete, now as then, the serpent was lurking close at hand, with temptation darting from his glittering eyes.

A shadow crossed Valerie's lovely face, and, in a moment, her peace was gone. She moved un-

easily, slowly unclosed her eyes, and involuntarily held out her hand. Then, as if in obedience to some unseen power, she lifted her weary head unwillingly, and sat upright, in the attitude of one who expects a summons, her eyes wide open, fixed, with an expression of awe, on the door which led into the garden.

The door was wide open, and, under the feathery branches of a tropical plant, a dark shadow hovered in the twilight of the moonlit night. Her eyes never stirred from this shadow, which seemed to hold them against her will.

Slowly, as if the fawn would have resisted if she could, she rose from her seat, and catching a trail of the passion-flower in one hand, waited, clinging to the frail branch as if it had power to hold her back.

The shadow came nearer to the door, and a hand beckoned. Her lips uttered a smothered groan, beads of agony stood out on her broad forehead, as, under the influence of an irresistible spell, she moved slowly forward, still clinging, in pitiful helplessness, to the trail of the passion-flower. The stalk broke, the blossom came off in her hand, and, with a look of despair dimming the brightness of her beauty, she took another step towards the door. She heard the music of the Golden Love Waltzes as in a dream, and, in the next minute, stepped over the threshold of safety; and, turning her back on home and friends, went out in the darkness to meet a man who inspired her with hatred and dread.

Looking neither to right nor left she moved slowly along the terrace, down the steps, past various couples who were too deeply plunged in flirtation to heed the white form fitting like a ghost, past friends of her father and family—brave men who would have dared anything to save a friend's daughter from the fate which she was following—on and on, further from the light of the coloured lamps, further from the sounds of music and laughter—on and on, till they reached a spot where the pleasure-grounds ended, and the park began.

There was a little gate with white posts, showing ghost-like in the darkness, and beyond it fine forest trees, with the shadows of the night under their branches. If she passed that gate—the boundary between the innocence and happy ignorance of the past and the temptations and fuller knowledge of the future—she was lost. Oh! was there no one in the whole wide world to save the unfortunate girl from such a fate?

Colonel Darrell turned when he reached the gate, and faced her. There was the pride of conscious power in his expression as he held out his hand.

"Come," he said, gently; "those who follow me never turn back."

Lady Valerie started violently, like a somnambulist suddenly roused from her sleep. It seemed as if in speaking he had helped to break the spell which he had cast over her. She passed her hand over her face in evident bewilderment.

"Where am I? Why am I here?"

"Because you could not stay away," he said, softly. "You have honoured me so far as to follow me, and for the future I am your most devoted servant."

"Take me back," she said, quickly, pride and resentment struggling with her fear. "Take me back at once!"

"Take you back!" with a tone of scorn in his voice, as if the request were preposterous. "Take you back, when you've come to me like an angel of light to give a new happiness to a miserable life!"

"If you won't take me I'll go without," throwing back her head with all the pride of a De Montfort.

"If you can go back so easily why did you come?"

"Why did I come?" she faltered, as if to herself, and turned away.

In an instant he placed himself before her, and looking down into her troubled face with pity and tenderness in his own. "My poor child, there is no good in struggling against your fate," he said, softly. "There is a tie between your heart and mine which nothing can break except death. Leave me now, and you will only come

back to me to-morrow—come with me, and I'll do my best to make you happy."

"Never! Let me pass. My father shall hear of your insolence."

"Stop!" he said, gravely, still standing in her way. "It is scarcely insolence to take what is given me. You came—I did not ask you; but having come you will stay!"

"Not for half a second. If I were only a man I would knock you down," clenching her small fist in impotent wrath. "I only came because you made me, and after to-night I will never speak to you again."

"I'm not afraid," with his cold, slow smile; "a woman must talk or die."

"I shall talk, but not to you. Help!" One cry in her shrill, young voice, and then he laid his hand on her shoulder and the sounds died away on her tongue; a quiver passed through her slender form from the crown of sunny curls to the tip of her feet in their tiny white shoes; her power to resist seemed to melt away like snow in the sun, the pride and the passion went out of her face, and without a word she clasped her hands in dumb agony.

"Lady Valerie, listen to me," he said, very gravely. "If I let you go back your life will be a misery to you, for as long as I live you will never be safe from the influence that I have over you. If I choose to beckon you must come, unless you can find some other man to exert a stronger influence than mine, and that would not be easy," with a scornful smile. Then his voice sank to a thrilling whisper, which seemed to freeze her blood. "From your father's dying bed I'd bring you, from your lover's arms—ay, from the very altar-rail on your wedding-day, and no one—father, friend or lover—should have the power to hold you back."

"Oh! for Heaven's sake!" white and trembling, with imploring eyes fixed in utter helplessness on his stern face. Was it a horrible nightmare from which she would awake the next minute? or could it be truth and reality, that she was standing here in the power of this stranger with friends and safety only a few hundred yards away? Had no one missed her, would no one—not even Rev. Verreker—take the trouble to come and find her? Across her misery came the remembrance of his honest blue eyes, and the spell which was upon her seemed to dwindle and fail.

"Do you want to kill me as you did Valentine?" she burst forth, half afraid of her own words.

Colonel Darrell's eyes shot fire. "Who has dared to tell you such a lie! Her blood, poor girl, is on her own head, not mine. I did not love her as I will love you, Valerie. She came to me because she could not stay away—it was not my will, but hers that brought her."

"That isn't true. I know all about her. Let me pass."

"No, we have stayed too long as it is. Come with me," trying to draw her hand through his arm. "Resistance is useless. From to-night you are mine—mine for ever!"

"No—no—no," she sobbed, whilst yielding involuntarily to his will. "I would rather die."

She was trembling once again, and the old helplessness had come over her. He led her unresistingly through the white gate, and never noticed that she had dropped her diamond star on the pathway. It lay forgotten on the gravel, twinkling like a veritable star that had fallen from the heavens above. Without one backward look Lady Valerie disappeared into the darkness, and the drooping branches of the trees seemed to gather round her in their eagerness to hold an impenetrable veil between the lovely heiress of Sandesert and all those who would fain have followed and saved.

He did not ask where he was taking her, or even observe in which direction they were going; but if her mind seemed to have gone to sleep Colonel Darrell's had never been more wide-awake. From time to time he stopped to look at his watch whenever there was the slightest glimmer of light through the trees, but generally the darkness made it impossible for him to see the hands. When at last he was able to ascertain that it was three o'clock he pressed on with

an eagerness that showed he had a definite object in view.

They hurried on in silence, her dress catching on roots or briars, and being torn to shreds, because neither took the trouble to detach it. Lady Valerie was far beyond any remembrance of her finery; a dull pain was in her heart, her brain was dizzy with conflicting thoughts, and she had no thought for her dress or her own fatigue.

"You are tired; let me carry you!" said the voice by her side.

She shrank away from him with a shudder, more eloquent than words. It said as plainly as possible,—

"I would rather die than suffer it."

He smiled, sardonically, knowing his own power.

The morning was breaking in slow beauty over wood and fell as they reached an opening in the trees, and caught sight of a stile leading into the public road.

Colonel Darrell stood still for a moment, lost in thought, till roused by the sound of a railway bell.

"Just as I thought," he murmured to himself, as he looked at his watch. "I knew it was about 3:15."

He led Lady Valerie up to the stile, looked doubtfully at her, then determined to run the risk, because of the emergency; told her to stay there, and he would be back in a minute. He hurried across the road and up the little hill to the station on the other side, in order to get the tickets without provoking remark; and the tired girl, unconscious that fate had given her one more chance for liberty, sank down on the lowest step, and drooped her head upon her knees.

(To be continued.)

A SCIENTIST says that the natural habit of human beings appears to be the use of the teeth on the left side of the mouth for masticating the food.

The air is clearest at Arequipa, Peru. From the observatory at that place, 8,050 ft. above the sea, a black spot 1 in. in diameter, placed on a white disc, has been seen on Mount Charchani, a distance of eleven miles, through a 13 in. telescope.

A good diamond is a good deal colder than an imitation, and the lapidaries say that the best way to detect this difference in temperature is to touch the stones to the tongue. Sapphires, emeralds, rubies, garnets and other precious stones may be tested in the same way—the real stones is invariably colder than the imitation. The lapidaries do not give a reason for the difference, but it may be found, perhaps, in the greater density of the real stone, which makes them better conductors of heat.

THE South African wagon is a long, heavy cart mounted on four high wheels, as a rule, with a sort of canvas tent over the back half, leaving the front clear to carry the miscellaneous furniture of its owner, drawn by sixteen, eighteen or twenty oxen, curiously fierce-looking with their immense spread of horn, sometimes as much as eight feet from tip to tip, and rarely less than six, but in reality as patient and hardworking beasts as one could wish to find. Their mode of progression is certainly slow, but there is a strangeness and a fascination about it which may draw men to it almost as the Alps draw their devotees. In front there marches the "voor-looper," generally a small boy, leading the two foremost oxen by a rein or rope passed through their nostrils. The driver walks alongside with the long and terrible whip he uses so unsparely, or else sits on the front of the wagon and gets off occasionally to lash up the whole team with unfailing impartiality. The travelling is all done at night, starting a little before sunset, and marching till perhaps eleven or twelve o'clock; then there is a halt till a little before the first signs of dawn, when they go on till the sun begins to get hot overhead, and then they lie by for the day.

ALL AMONG THE HEATHER.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"COME TO ME!" HE CRIED.

THE snow and frost that accompanied Elsie to Cornwall did not last long, neither did the extreme cold weather again show itself at Trebartha that winter.

Indeed, New Year's Day was as warm and genial as though it had been early summer, and Clarence Maltby had suggested to Elsie that they should go out for a sail in a small yacht which Mrs. Penfold had given him as a new year's gift.

But Elsie declined; she said she was afraid of the sea, as she probably was, and she certainly had no desire to take a pleasure-trip with such a companion.

"Well, come and see me off, if you won't come with me," said Clarence, in an aggrieved tone, "and don't bring that horrid maid of yours. I can't speak a word to you while she is by."

"I don't care to go out alone, and I like Tamzen," replied Elsie, carelessly.

But she was scarcely paying the attention to the matter which Mr. Maltby seemed to think it merited, for her mind was full of what Perran had told her the previous night, and she was beginning to think that what the woman hinted at was more than probable, and that it would be well for them both to go to the Hermitage, and see Mrs. Curtis with as little delay as possible.

With her mind thus occupied, Elsie paid very little heed to the preparations for a sail that were being made. She saw neither harm nor danger in going down half-way to the cove to watch the yacht start from the foot of Trebartha steps, and she promised to do so.

It was Tamzen's agitated manner that at first attracted Elsie's attention.

The maid was pale and nervous, and she made several attempts to speak before she succeeded in asking,—

"Do you mean to go with him, miss?"

"Go with whom?" asked Elsie, quickly.

"With Mr. Maltby," was the reply.

"No," was the cold and somewhat curt reply, for Elsie had previously observed that Tamzen took more interest in the young man than was desirable for her own peace of mind.

"He means to take you with him," said the servant, slowly, and not without difficulty. "He's planned it all with Mrs. Penfold. He's got a license in his pocket to marry you. He's going up to Padstow; he'll anchor in the river all night, and takes you to church the next morning."

"But I won't marry him!" asserted Elsie, angrily.

"They say you'll be bound to marry him if you stay on board the yacht all night, and he will take good care you don't get ashore before the morning," replied Tamzen.

Elsie's face became very pale.

Several little things she had observed helped to confirm the girl's story, and she was now thoroughly alarmed.

"What am I to do?" she asked, helplessly.

Then she demanded, with sudden incredulity,—

"Are you quite sure that Mrs. Penfold knows of this infamous plot?"

"'Tis her plot, not his," returned Tamzen, sternly. "I overheard her tell him all about it. He isn't so sweet on the matter himself, for he always thought he would be master of Trebartha without your help, but the mistress insisted, and she always will have her own way."

Elsie, by this time, had turned to retrace her steps to the castle, and she said, angrily,—

"I won't leave the house again to-day, and they can't drag me down to the boat."

"No, miss, but they'll get you there another time if they don't to-day," said Tamzen, nervously, "and I've got a message for you from Perran. She bade me tell you 'the time has come.'"

"What did she mean?"

"I don't know, miss, but she said she'd meet

you at the stone cross at the foot of the hill as soon as the yacht had sailed from the cove."

"But why not before?" demanded Elsie.

"I suppose she can't get away, miss; besides, you'll want a little time before you; and she said something about Mrs. Penfold and the Court of Chancery, but I don't know what she meant."

Elsie knew, however.

She was so far alive to the situation that she knew it was more than probable that if she did not marry Clarence Mrs. Penfold would claim the guardianship of her, and, if her authority were disputed, would at once make her a ward in Chancery.

Still she did not understand all that Tamzen wanted to suggest, and it was with no slight amazement that she listened while her maid proposed that they should, at the time appointed, go half-way down to the cove as previously arranged, and should stay at the entrance of the smuggler's cave, having first made a sufficient change in their attire for Tamzen to be mistaken for the lady, and Elsie for the maid. Then Tamzen was to allow herself to be carried off, and Elsie was to hide in the cave till the yacht sailed away.

Naturally enough Tamzen did not rise in the esteem of her mistress as she thus unfolded her plan, but she cared little for this, if she could get her consent to the stratagem.

Elsie, who scarcely believed that anything of the kind would be attempted, and who did not know how otherwise to help herself if it were, at length reluctantly promised to go to the cove, and for a few minutes to allow Tamzen to put on her coat and hat, in which she would take care to let Mrs. Penfold and Clarence see her before she started.

It all seemed simple enough, and as the sailors belonging to the yacht were not men from the neighbourhood, but strangers to the place, the probability was that Tamzen's plot would succeed, if Clarence were not waiting to receive her when she was brought on deck.

But this, she believed, he would not be doing, she having heard it arranged that he should keep out of sight of his captive until they had left the cove.

Of one thing Elsie was quite determined. If such an attempt upon her freedom were made, she would no longer consider herself bound to Mrs. Penfold by given promises or interested kindness, but would hasten to the Hermitage with all possible speed, taking Nan Perran with her.

Now that the mystery which surrounded her early life was cleared up, or was likely to be so, she no longer desired to shun Lionel Denison.

She had, if the truth be told, been a little disappointed at his not having sought and found her here; but as her boxes had not arrived, and as none of the letters which she had written to Charlie Birch or to Isolt Greatrex had been answered, she began to think that something more than indifference on the part of her friends was the cause of their unaccountable silence.

But a critical hour is at hand.

It had first of all been proposed that the trip should take place in the morning; then, as Elsie resolutely refused to go on board the yacht, it was postponed till after luncheon, on the presumption that Mrs. Penfold would go with the girls.

At the last moment, however, the old lady changed her mind, and they went off without her.

Clarence had already left the castle, and had gone on board.

The two girls saw the boat in which he had left the strand reach the side of the pretty craft.

But there was no sign of interest from any one else on the shore.

The few men who lived in the village of Trebartha were either out at sea or working in the slate quarries, and the women and children rarely went down on the narrow slip-

of sand, unless they had some reason for so doing.

"Quick," said Tamzen, as Elsie stood at the mouth of the cave, looking at the graceful yacht.

Rather reluctantly our heroine disappeared with the girl into the cave, and in a few seconds the change of dress was made.

The change, indeed, was in Tamzen. She seemed all at once to be a person of some importance as she came out into the light and waved her handkerchief to Maitby, who was on board the yacht.

At that moment footsteps were heard ascending the step, and a few seconds afterwards three men appeared, one after the other, and Elsie then knew that Tamzen had told her the truth.

Neither of the girls was known to these men personally, but they were told what the lady would wear, and they now addressed themselves to Tamzen.

"We've come to take you on board, miss," said the foremost. "We won't do you no harm, you'll be well taken care of, but it's no use making a fuss, for there's nobody to help you."

Tamzen dared not trust herself to speak, but she turned to Elsie, who had shrank back into the shadow of the cave.

"No, we don't want that young woman," said the man quickly; "our orders are, she is to stay behind, and now I must gag you, miss, unless you promise to hold your tongue."

"I—I won't speak!" gasped the girl in real terror.

"And you won't struggle or make any sign for help!" demanded the ruffian, sternly.

"No," was the trembling reply.

Then she was marched down the winding steps, one of the men leading the way, and two of them following her.

In that manner they entered the boat, and went on board the yacht, and Elsie stood where they had left her, and watched the graceful craft, with her wing-like sails unfurled, glide bravely out to sea.

That was the last that was seen at Trebartha of the *Elfreda* and her ill-fated crew.

They started late in the afternoon, and night soon overtook them.

What happened on board when it was discovered that the servant and not the mistress had been captured, none have survived to tell. The yacht never made Padstow nor any other harbour that night, and many days afterwards portions of her wreck were found, conclusive evidence as to what had been her fate.

Knowing nothing of what was going to be, and conscious only that she had escaped a great danger, Elsie sought the secret steps in the cave which Tamzen had previously shown her, and climbing up these with no slight difficulty, she at length found herself not only in the open air, but in a path by the side of a higher road, which shielded her from the sight of anyone in the castle.

Her great desire now was to get away from Trebartha, from the home of her ancestors, and the place of her birth.

If all went well with her, and if her hopes were realised, she would come back again and make this place her home likewise.

But now there was danger in the very air she breathed—safety only was to be found in flight; and if Perran were at the stone cross or not, she felt that she must hasten to London, however difficult it might be to get there.

Coming by this hidden path, she did not see the stone cross at the foot of the hill upon which the castle stood, until, on turning an angle, she came close upon it, and then she became conscious that a man was there as well as a woman, and with a strange combination of hope and fear, her eyes sought his face.

"Elsie, my darling, come to me!" he cried, extending his arms, while his face was eloquent with the love that filled his soul.

Never was such an entreaty responded to more quickly, or with less reserve; for without a moment's hesitation the girl sprang forward, was clasped to Lionel Denison's heart, and in that rapturous embrace they knew, without words

being spoken, that from henceforth there would be no parting—no misunderstanding—between them.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCLUSION.

PERRAN accompanied Elsie and Mr. Denison to London, where they did not arrive until the evening of the following day.

The old woman was by no means pleased with the presence of the gentleman, and Elsie's explanation that he was her guardian—the man who had found and cared for her when she was a child—did not reconcile her to the fact that, guardian or not, he was undoubtedly a lover.

Convinced as she was that Elsie was the daughter of her late master and mistress, and her mind being incapable of realising the idea that any save the reigning family in England could be socially above the Trebarthas, Perran felt bitterly convinced that the match for Elsie was far from being a good one.

She ventured, indeed, to hint as much when she was alone with the young lady that night.

But Elsie silenced the suggestion at once by saying proudly,—

"Mr. Denison is a gentleman, one of the most noble and tender-hearted of men; and if I were a queen I should feel proud and honoured to become his wife."

After this Perran said no more.

She had a duty to perform—a duty to the dead as well as to the living; and when this was accomplished she felt that she should drift back to Trebartha to end her days in the place where she was born.

One of Elsie's first questions when she and Lionel could talk quietly together was about Edith Grey. The woman's cruel words still rankled in the girl's heart, and she wished to know how much truth there was in them.

And Lionel told her all, truthfully and without reserve.

He did not pretend that he had not loved Edith, nor that her conduct had not pained him deeply at the time, but he told Elsie also what was equally true, that Edith had really jilted him to be free to accept a more wealthy suitor, and that he did not know until his return from China, fifteen years afterwards, that she had not actually married Mr. Hazlewood, of Starcroft.

"But I never loved her, my darling, as I love you!" he concluded, clasping the fair girl in his arms.

"I have heard that there is no love like the first love," sighed Elsie, sadly.

"And I have heard that there is no love like the last love," he retorted, with a laugh; "but you need never be jealous of Miss Grey, my dear; there is no woman under the sun for whom I have such a sincere contempt."

No doubt Elsie was quite satisfied that his heart was all her own, for she began to tell him about Mrs. Penfold and the Trebarthas, and she astonished him not a little by asserting that Perran believed, and she herself did not doubt, that she was the last of the Trebarthas.

"So instead of marrying a penniless little outcast you will get an heiress for a wife," she said, looking at him proudly and tenderly.

But his face became grave. The news was scarcely welcome; and Elsie, who noticed the change and insisted upon knowing the cause, soon learnt that he feared she would be taken away from him.

"Yes, that is what I feared," she replied; "for I heard that Mrs. Penfold said something about the Court of Chancery, and that is why I was so anxious to meet you, dear. I am not going to be sent away now, you may be quite sure."

"Then we had better get married as soon as possible," he said, promptly. "We won't have anything investigated with regard to your birth until you are my wife. I have always had a great objection to marry an heiress."

"But I must sign my name as *Elfreda Trebartha* for once in my life," protested Elsie. "I couldn't marry you under any other name."

He objected, but of course he had to yield; and

If he supposed that he was going to control Perran and Mrs. Curtis he gave himself credit for having much more authority than he was ever likely to possess.

For the old Cornishwoman had not been in The Hermitage more than an hour before she and Mrs. Curtis had talked over the whole affair, and Perran had produced her little petticoat worked by the hands of the late Lady Trebartha, and Mrs. Curtis had brought out the clothes in which Elfie had first come to her.

They had been washed and kept in lavender ever since, but Perran recognised them all, even to the common little frock and cape that had been taken from her nephew's wife at the time that Sir Walter Trebartha's child was stolen.

In confirmation of her story, Perran unripped the band of the embroidered petticoat the child had worn when she was found, and inside it, back-stitched in long hair, were the two names "Elfreda Trebartha." It was a piece of another garment that had been used for a band, and the woman remembered the circumstance of the petticoat being made, and knew where to seek for the proof, which was to her mind conclusive.

She was persuaded, though not without difficulty, to tell her story to a lawyer, to sign her name to sundry papers, and to stay at The Hermitage until after Elfie was married.

She was, indeed, one of the witnesses at this quiet, but all-important ceremony.

Lionel had gone to stay with a clerical friend in the neighbourhood, while the slow days went by that the law required to elapse before the wedding could take place.

But the happy morning at last arrived. The wedding took place without fuss or secrecy, and when the happy pair went off for their honeymoon, Perran set out on her solitary journey to Cornwall.

She doubted much the kind of reception she would meet with at Trebartha, but she was not prepared for the startling change that had come over her old mistress in the short time that she had been away.

Mrs. Penfold rallied and once more sat upright when she learnt that Elfie was still alive. Up to this time she had feared that she, as well as Clarence Maltby, had found a watery grave.

After this very little seemed to surprise her.

She was quite ready to admit that Elfie was the child stolen from Sir Walter Trebartha and his wife Elfreda. She had felt but little doubt on the matter from the first hour they had met, and she was now so thankful to know that Elfie was still alive that she at once sent for her lawyer, expressed her willingness to give up the castle to the rightful heiress, and at the same time she gave instructions for a will, in which the whole of her own fortune, with the exception of a few legacies, was bequeathed to our heroine.

Even Elfie's marriage did not displease her, and she expressed a wish to see the bride and bridegroom before she herself went away from the castle.

But she never did go away alive.

One day they found her seated as usual at her bedroom window, whence she could command an extensive view of the sea-beaten coast.

She had fallen asleep here, and that sleep had deepened to one from which there is no waking.

Edith Grey heard of Lionel Denison's marriage, as did most of the world, by means of the newspapers, before many days had passed by, and she could not imagine who Elfreda Trebartha could be.

Her curiosity was so great that at length she induced her mother to call at The Hermitage, see the housekeeper, and obtain all particulars about the bride of the man whom she had herself jilted.

Knowing to whom the story would be repeated, Mrs. Curtis was very communicative, and she particularly impressed upon her listener that it had all come about through Miss Grey driving poor little Elfie from The Hermitage.

"If she hadn't been drove away and obliged to earn a living, she'd never have met the grand folks she was stolen from," continued Mrs. Curtis, emphatically. "So all the good fortune

has come to Mrs. Denison through your daughter, me'am, though, as I say—small thanks to her for it."

When all this was repeated to Edith she uttered a sharp cry, and seemed to be seized with agonising pain.

Some people said it was tight-lacing, others said it was the poison she had taken for many years in small doses to improve her complexion. Whatever the cause the result was the same.

A few minutes ensued in which the physical agony of a lifetime seemed to be concentrated, and then the struggle ceased; the pain died out, and the life of the miserable woman died out with it.

* * * * *

Arthur Carew, after listening to the conversation between Elfie and Mr. Kingwood at the ball at Trevelyan Court, made up his mind to call upon the young lady and propose to her as soon as possible.

But when he did call at Monkshill, he heard that she had gone away, though a servant whom he liberally bribed gave him the address to which her luggage was directed.

Thither he went, and saw Isolt Greatrex, who told him truly enough that she knew nothing of the whereabouts of her friend.

She invited him to stay to luncheon, however, and he did so, making the acquaintance of Mr. Greatrex, who seemed to take rather a fancy to him.

He called again to learn if Isolt had heard from Elfie. Indeed, this was an excuse for a great many visits, until excuse was no longer needed, and he came at length in the character of an accepted suitor.

Before he and Isolt were married, however, Harry Kingwood led to the altar the mistress of Monkshill.

There were people malice enough to broadly hint that Charlie proposed, and that she likewise did most of the wooing; but the young lady herself cares nothing for these rumours, and laughs merrily when she hears them.

He laughs who wins, and some people are not too scrupulous as to the manner in which they gain their ends, provided only that success crowns their efforts.

* * * * *

As for Lionel Denison, he has suffered much, and has waited long for his happiness, but it has come to him at last—a rich, ripe, golden harvest.

Elfie and he spend the greater portion of their time at Trebartha Castle, but they will not sell The Hermitage, though they have been often asked to do so.

Some few weeks in each year they always live here, to the great delight of Mrs. Curtis, who is getting old now, but who is never tired of talking of the day when her master brought her a sleeping child, who is now his wife, and whom he had found "ALL AMONG THE HEATHER!"

[THE END.]

* * * * *

The most costly and precious wine in the world is that contained in a cask named the "Rosa," in the Bremen Town Hall cellars. This Radesheim, of the vintage of the year 1653, is of the colour of old ale. It is never sold, but is used exclusively for the sick of Bremen, the only exceptions having been when a small bottle was presented to the Emperor William I., another to Frederick III., and one to Prince Bismarck.

EMIGRATION TO CANADA.—We call the attention of our readers to the advertisement of the Canadian Government in another column. It sets out concisely the advantages Canada offers to intending emigrants. No persons who are contemplating fresh fields and pastures new should think of arriving at a decision without obtaining the fullest possible information on the subject, and in this respect they cannot go to a higher authority than the High Commissioner for Canada (17, Victoria Street, London, S.W.), or the agents of the Canadian Government, who are stationed in different parts of the United Kingdom.

THE MOST NUTRITIOUS.

EPPS'S COCOA

GRATEFUL—COMFORTING.
BREAKFAST—SUPPER.



KEARSLEY'S 100 YEARS REPUTATION WIDOW WELCH'S FEMALE PILLS

Awarded Certificates of Merit for the cure of Irregularities, Anæsthesia, and all Female Complaints. They have the approval of the Medical Profession. Beware of Imitations. The only genuine and original are in *White Paper Wrappers*. Boxes, Is. 1½d. and 2s. 2d. of all Chemists. 2d. od. box contains three times the pills. Or by post, 1s. or 3s. stamps, by the makers, C. and G. KEARSLEY, 17, North Street, Westminster. Sold in the Colonies.

DOMESTIC SERVANTS WANTED IN CANADA.

For villages, towns, cities, and in the country districts. Advice may be obtained in the United Kingdom from Government Agents and in Canada from Government Agents. Ladies' Committees are also formed in many places in Canada. Apply for pamphlets and all information supplied gratis and post free, to the High Commissioner for Canada, 17, Victoria Street, London, S.W.; also from the Allan, Donnison and Elder Dempster Steamship Co., or their local Agents, and the Canadian Pacific Railway Company.



In Albania, a man who is about to marry is forbidden, by the etiquette of the country, to mention the subject, and he is obliged to act as if he were very much ashamed of himself throughout the ceremony.

MEN exposed to the rigours of the Alaskan winter never wear moustaches. They wear full beards to protect the throat and face, but keep the upper lips clean shaven. The moisture from the breath congeals so quickly that a moustache becomes embedded in a solid cake of ice, and the face is frozen in a short time.

THE deepest verified soundings are those made in the Atlantic Ocean, 90 miles off the Island of St. Thomas, in the West Indies, 3,875 fathoms, or 23,250 ft. Deep water has been reported south of the Grand Bank of Newfoundland over 27,000 ft. in depth; but additional soundings in that locality did not corroborate this.

FACETLÆ.

Dot : "Is that fellow really a painless dentist?" Lot : "Almost. The only pain I suffered was when he extracted his fœs."

WHEN a girl tells a young man that he may have a kiss if he can catch her, she always manages to get caught.

"JOHN, I'm going to sell these rolling-pins and flatirons in one lot. How shall I label them for the auctioneer?" "War material, my love!"

BROWN : "My wife says I talk in my sleep." Jones : "Well, you're lucky." Brown : "How so?" Jones : "My wife does all the talking in mine."

FRANK : "Blanche pinned a tiny flatiron on my coat last night." Dick : "Do you know what that means?" "No." "She wants you to press your suit."

MRS. McCARLEM : "That piano lamp ye sold me is no good, an' Ol' want ye to take it back." Dealer : "Eh! Why?" Mrs. McCARLEM : "Divil a chance can we git out of it."

CHOLLY : "I never shall marry a strong-minded woman, never." Minerva : "No, of course you won't. The woman you marry will be weak-minded, I'm sure."

"I CAN marry any girl I please," he said, with a self-satisfied, "If-you-love-a-girl-would-you-marry-her expression upon his languid face. "No doubt," she responded, "but what girl do you please?" They don't speak now.

"I UNDERSTAND it was a case of love at first sight," he said. "It was," replied the dearest friend of the woman in question. "It had to be. If he had looked a second time he never could have fallen in love with her."

SMITH : "One can't always judge a man's patriotism by his conversation." Jones : "No, I suppose not." "Take Brown, for instance; would you call him a coward?" "Well, er—I might, if I was sure he wouldn't fight."

SAUOONIST (to new bar-tender) : "One rule of this house is never to sell any more liquor to a man after he has had enough." Bar-tender : "How am I to know when he has had enough?" Saloonist : "As soon as his money gives out."

SHE : "Do you know that the average woman's waist is thirty inches round?" He : "Yes; and isn't it a peculiar coincidence that the average man's arm is thirty inches long?" She : "I don't believe that." He then proved his assertion.

HUSBAND (cynically) : "Ah, women are all alike. When I first asked you to marry me, what did you say? Why, you said that you wouldn't marry the noblest man that ever breathed." Wife (quietly) : "Well, I didn't, dear."

"I UNDERSTAND there are some firms that always give a young employé a rise when he marries," she said. "Yes, it is a strange fact," replied the cynical bachelor, "that there are some men so constituted that they enjoy encouraging other men to get into trouble."

MRS. MOTHER : "For mercy's sake, what are you crying about, Carrie?" Her Daughter : "Harry called me 'dearest' to-day." Her Mother : "I'm sure that was nice." Her Daughter : "If I am dearest somebody else must be dear. If there is, it will surely break my heart."

"Yes," said the sad-eyed man, "my wife was the belle of Ipswich when I courted her, and I had rivals by the score." "But you succeeded in winning the prize!" observed his listener. "I don't know—I don't know," answered the other, a far-away look in his eyes; "but I married her."

"IN Austria," she said, "nearly all the barbers are women." He looked up from his paper and shook his head doubtfully. "I wouldn't like it," he said at last. "It's bad enough to have prize-fight news dinned into your ear when you're helpless, but it would be infinitely worse to have to hear all about the latest fashion."

MR. GOODFELLOW (showing his wife around his counting house) : "And these are the day books!" Mrs. Goodfellow : "Yes? Now show me the night books!" Mr. Goodfellow (mystified) : "The night books?" Mrs. Goodfellow : "Yes; those that you have to work over at night and that keep you down here until two o'clock in the morning!"

MRS. FARMER WHIFFLETREE (sighing) : "Only think! Josh Johnson has bin going with Sally Simpson for nigh fourteen years, an' they haln't married yet." Mrs. Farmer Swamproot (indignantly) : "Yis. And Mister Josh Johnson wants to be plaguey careful and git a move on him or she'll right up and jilt him. You can't trifle much with them Simpson girls, let me tell yew."

A MERRY young Irishman, not long from the old country, is employed as coachman by a suburban family. Recently, while suffering from a very severe cold, he made his appearance one morning with his hair cut close to his head. "Why, Dennis," said his mistress in shocked accents, "whatever possessed you to have your hair cut while you were suffering from a cold?" "Well, mum," replied the unabashed Dennis, "I do be takin' notice this long while that whenever I have my hair cut I take a bad cold, so I thought to myself that now, while I had the cold on me, it would be the time of all others to go and get me haircutting done, for by that course I would save myself just one cold. Do you see the power of me reasonin', mum?"

"WHAT is a flirt?" asked the small boy. "A flirt," replied the old bachelor, "is a pretty woman." "But what kind of a pretty woman?" persisted the small boy. "Any kind of a pretty woman," answered the old bachelor. "Well, how pretty must she be?" the young gater insisted. "Oh, pretty enough to have a chance to flirt," returned the old bachelor, irritably. And still the boy was not satisfied; but as he grows older he will understand it better.

The regiment was drawn up for church parade at Malta, but the church was being repaired and could not accommodate them all. "Sergeant-major," ordered the colonel, "tell all the men who don't want to go to church to fall out on the reverse flank." A large number quickly and gladly availed themselves of the privilege. "Now, sergeant-major," said the colonel, "dismiss all the men who did not fall out, and march the others off to church—they want it most."

DURING a lesson in a medical college recently one of the students, who was by no means a dullard, was naked by the professor: "How much is a dose of—" (giving the technical name of croton-oil). "A teaspoonful," was the ready reply. The professor made no comment; but the student a quarter of an hour later realized he had made a mistake, and straightwith said: "Professor, I want to change my answer to that question." "It's too late, sir," responded the professor, looking at his watch; "your patient's been dead fourteen minutes!"

You wish the Best? certainly. Then use

CALVERT'S CARBOLIC PREPARATIONS

THE BEST DISINFECTANTS,

THE BEST SOAPS,

THE BEST DENTIFRICES,

AND

THE BEST OINTMENT.

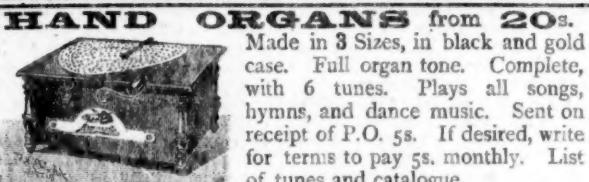
They have been Awarded 100 Gold and Silver Medals and Diplomas for Superior Excellence, and should be used in every Household to prevent Infectious Diseases.

Can be obtained at Chemists, Grocers, Stores, &c.

BUYERS ARE WARNED AGAINST INFERIOR IMITATIONS, WHICH ARE NUMEROUS.

Illustrated List Post Free on Application.

F.C. CALVERT & CO. (P.O. BOX 512), Manchester.



ATLAS CO., 185, High Street, Caxton Town, London; 63, Seven Sisters Road; 14, High Road, Kilburn. (See LONDON READER).

HAND ORGANS from 20s.

Made in 3 Sizes, in black and gold case. Full organ tone. Complete, with 6 tunes. Plays all songs, hymns, and dance music. Sent on receipt of P.O. 5s. If desired, write for terms to pay 5s. monthly. List of tunes and catalogue.

SOCIETY.

QUEEN WILHELMINA has, it appears, a great taste for painting, and her present ambition is to create a striking battle scene on canvas.

PRINCE HENRY OF PRUSSIA, who is now on his way home from China, will arrive at Genoa on February 5th, and will then travel by train to Berlin, and is expected to arrive at Kiel on the 10th of the month.

THE war will probably be responsible for the abandonment of the Queen's projected visit to Bordighera in the spring. Of course, many things may happen now and March, and Her Majesty's medical advisers will no doubt strongly urge that the visit should be made if possible. But, at the moment, there is considerable doubt in regard to the matter.

ALMOST all the great families have some strong personal interest in the war. The Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch have a son and a son-in-law in the 10th Hussars. The Duke of Portland has a half-brother in the same regiment, and one in the 9th Lancers. Viscount Crichton, eldest son of the Earl and Countess of Erne, has gone out with Colonel Brokehurst. The Marquis of Salisbury's soldier son, Major Lord Edward Cecil, is at Mafeking.

THE Duke and Duchess of Connaught have abandoned their projected trip to the South of Europe in consequence of the Duke's appointment to the Dublin command. The Queen would have preferred the Duke to return to Aldershot for a time, as he could have worked that district from Bagshot, and the place will now be closed during his absence in Ireland. The Duke and Duchess will pay visits to the Queen at Osborne and to the Prince and Princess of Wales at Sandringham before going to Dublin.

THE Prince of Wales is to be formally invited to visit Hull in May next, in order that he may cut the first sod in connection with the immense jett-dock scheme of the North-Eastern and Hull and Barnsley Railway Companies.

SINCE the return of the Tsar and the Tsaritsa to Russia there have been several Imperial hunting parties in the forest round Gatchina and Peterhof, and large bags have been obtained, including the lynx and the elk, and deer, wolves, foxes and bears. The Emperor Nicholas cares very little about shooting, but his brother, the Grand Duke Michael, is a keen sportsman and an excellent shot. There has also been a grand chasse on the estate of Duke George of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, near Oranienbaum, which is one of the best sporting domains in the north part of Russia.

ROYAL tradition always makes the direct heirs to the Throne soldiers, and it is already announced that little Prince Edward of York is to go into the Army. If the rule of our Royal House is still followed in the Duke of York's family, the second boy, Prince Albert, should be a sailor, but as he is only three years old his career may not be settled. Prince Edward, however, reached the mature age of five recently, and his future regiment has even been chosen—the 10th Hussars.

IN Vienna it is confidently stated that the young daughter of the late ill-fated Austrian Crown Prince is betrothed to Duke Robert of Wurtemberg. The young princess will not be seventeen until September. Duke Robert has little chance of coming to the throne to which his father is the heir, because his elder brother is married to an Austrian Grand Duchess and has several sons. He will, however, be rich through his mother, also an Austrian Grand Duchess, and his reputed bride-elect will be immensely wealthy. The Royal House of Wurtemberg are Lutherans, but the Ducal line has always adhered steadfastly to the Roman Catholic faith, hence their marrying into the Austrian Royal family. It is said that Archduchess Elizabeth will be married in the spring, and that early in the summer her mother, Crown Princess Stephanie, will renounce her Imperial Austrian rank and marry, as a Belgian Princess, Count von Lonyay.

STATISTICS.

THERE are 9,000 cells in a square foot of honeycomb.

ABOUT 7,000,000 of the population of the United States are of foreign birth.

The official figure as to the consumption of coal in Great Britain last year is 157,000,000 tons.

PRINCESS ENA OF BATTENBERG, who celebrated her twelfth birthday at Balmoral recently, is the first Royal child born in Scotland in 300 years. Charles Stuart was the last before her.

GEMS.

INDEPENDENCE, like honour, is a rocky island without a beach.

Few of us gain by the mistakes of others, but he who fails to profit by his own mistakes will soon be bankrupt in knowledge.

TACT is a gift; it is likewise a grace. As a gift, it may or may not have fallen to our share; as a grace, we are bound either to possess or to acquire it.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

CLARET JELLISS.—Ingredients: One pint of claret, two gills of water, one gill of lemon juice, half an ounce of leaf gelatine, one inch of cinnamon, two cloves, the thimble-pared rind of half a lemon, two tablespoonfuls of red-currant jelly. Put all the ingredients into a clean, bright pan, bring them slowly to the boil, and then simmer for five minutes. See that your mould is perfectly clean and free from all grease, then strain the contents of the pan into it, and leave it to set.

SANDWICHES A LA ROYALE.—Ingredients: Four boiled eggs, four tablespoonfuls of white sauce or cream, four tablespoonfuls of very finely chopped cooked chicken, two tablespoonfuls of finely chopped ham, two tablespoonfuls of finely chopped olives, salt and cayenne. Cut thin slices of bread-and-butter. Rub the yolks of eggs quite smoothly with cream. Stir in the ham, chicken, and olives. Season well. Spread this mixture on the bread, and cut up into rounds the size of the top of a claret-glass. Arrange neatly on a lace-paper with a sprig or two of parsley.

LEMON CURD.—Ingredients: Four ounces fresh butter, half a pound castor sugar, rind and juice of three lemons, three halfpenny sponge fingers, four eggs and two extra yolks. Be sure and use good fresh butter. Melt it in a clean enamel saucepan. Then add the sugar, grated rind and strained juice of the lemons, and the sponge fingers made into crumbs, either by sieving or grating. Beat the eggs slightly together in a basin, then strain them into the pan, and stir over a slow fire till the ingredients thicken and resemble honey. Do not let the mixture boil. Pour it into clean dry pots. Tie down and keep in a cool dry cupboard till wanted.

TREACLE SPONGE.—Ingredients: Half a pound of flour, half a teaspoonful of carbonate of soda, three-quarters of an ounce of ground ginger, quarter of a pound of suet, one gill of golden syrup or treacle, one gill of milk, one egg. Sieve together the flour, soda, and ginger. Chop the suet very finely, and add it to the flour. Beat up the egg, and mix it into the milk and treacle. Now pour these quickly to the dry ingredients, and mix thoroughly. Pour the mixture into a well-greased basin, and cover the top with a piece of greased paper. Stand the basin in a saucepan with boiling water to come only half-way up it, and steam the pudding for two hours. Then turn it out carefully, and serve with sweet sauce.

MISCELLANEOUS.

PEASANTS in the South of France spend about sixpence a day for food for a family of five.

LOCKS like those in use to-day, which could only be opened by the knowledge of a certain combination of numbers, were known to the Chinese centuries ago.

THE onion was worshipped by the ancient Egyptians. The cauliflower is a patrician among vegetables, and was taken from its Cyprus home to Italy to England in the reign of Elizabeth.

MANY birds have an instinctive prescience of floods, and will change the positions of their nests or make other provisions for safety just before a heavy rainfall resulting in a flood which sweeps away their former homes.

CLOVER SICKNESS, a common disease that often ruins clover-crops, has caused German scientists to make experiments. They say that farmers will soon be able to inoculate their lands just as human beings may be treated.

GREEN, sappy wood and green herbage are excellent conductors of electricity. A tree is shattered by lightning only when the discharge reaches the naked trunk or branches, which are poorer conductors.

OUR tropical and sub-tropical variety of seaweed is known which, when it reaches its full development, is at least 600 feet in length. Seaweed receives its nourishment from the air and mineral matter held in solution in the seawater.

A REMARKABLE bird found in Mexico is the bee-martin, which has a trick of rolling up the feathers on the top of its head into the exact semblance of a beautiful flower. When a bee comes along to sip honey from the supposed flower, it is snapped up by the bird.

THE largest city in the world is London, which has a population equaling the combined populations of Paris, Berlin, St. Petersburg, and Rome. Its streets, placed in a row, would reach round the world, leaving a bit over long enough to reach from London to San Francisco.

THE poppy has been found to have the valuable property of binding with its roots the soil in which it grows in such a manner that it will prove most valuable in supporting embankments. In France, railway embankments are frequently sown with poppies.

OPAL-MINING is one of the latest Australian mineral industries. The principal opal-mining centre is White Cliffs, where the gem has been found in highly payable quantities and of the richest quality, within a radius of ten miles, and a population of 1,500, or thereabouts, is settled there.

IT is not generally known that oil or fat, which is an important ingredient in the food of the Equimaux, to support the animal heat, is equally essential, for a different purpose, for the native races of the Tropics. It supplies an oily secretion in the perspiration necessary for the protection of the skin from strong sunlight and heat.

THE Japanese always bury their dead with the head to the north, and for this reason no Japanese will sleep with his head in that position. Many private houses and hotels have a diagram of the points of the compass pasted on the bedroom ceiling for the convenience of guests.

NORWAY has a law dealing with cremation. According to the Act, every person over fifteen years of age can be cremated after death if he or she has made a declaration in the presence of two witnesses. For those under fifteen a declaration on the part of the parents is necessary.

THE ordinary grey-brown rabbit is almost undistinguishable in a field of bracken, stubble, or dry grass so long as it sits still; but directly it begins to run towards its burrow, it is betrayed by the white patch on its tail. This white patch, which at first seems like a failure of adaptation, has its special function: it acts as a danger-signal to the young rabbits, and directs them which way to escape the threatened danger.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ANXIOUS.—You were quite right in leaving two cards.

B. P.—The cost of a will depends entirely upon its length.

BLACK TULIP.—Do not know of a lady's club such as you desire.

BARB.—Barbara is of Latin descent. The first Barbara was a foreigner or stranger.

BIRDIE.—Spray both the bird and the cage with a solution of alum and water.

FAT.—Patrick came to Ireland through the Latin, and signifies a patrician or nobleman.

AUNTIE.—Before he can obtain academical distinction, examinations must be undergone.

ROGER.—Register at Stationers' Hall, E.C. Publication is necessary to complete protection.

POLLY.—The 14th day of July, 1870, fell on Friday, and the 30th of June, 1878, on Saturday.

S. G.—The German Emperor is honorary colonel of the Scots Guards, and so also is the Tsar of Russia.

IGNORANCE.—A royal flush is the ace, king, queen, jack and ten spot of any one suit. It is an invincible hand.

DOLLIE.—Must be rubbed till below the stain with fine glasspaper. This should be done all over the top, and then repolished.

WORRIED ROSE.—You certainly should not allow the gentleman to stay too late. Your mother is the proper person to speak to him about it.

FOR THE CIRCLE.—From the seventh to the fourteenth centuries the New Year began at Christmas. The year was made to commence on January 1st for the first time in 1752.

STELLA.—Dried orange-peel allowed to smoulder on a piece of red hot iron or an old shovel will kill any had odour in existence, and leave a fragrant one behind instead.

NERVOUS SUTOR.—There is no determined time for a sutor to declare himself: a gentleman generally offers his hand when he believes it most certain of being accepted.

A NURSERY.—For creaky boots, soak the soles of the boots thoroughly with warm water, and while wet apply a liberal coating of oil or grease, and allow it to dry into the sole slowly.

PANTS.—Fill the tins with cold water, to which half a teaspoonful of carbonate of soda has been added. Put on rather a cold part of the stove, and let hot till the water boils, and the tins will be quite easy to clean.

WORRIED HOSTESS.—You must use your own judgment in such a matter. It is not wise to introduce people indiscriminately to each other without reflecting whether the introduction will be agreeable to both parties.

CINDERELLA.—The best method of cleaning silver is to moisten some finely powdered whiting with spirits of hartshorn, rub it on the silver, let it dry, then rub off with a soft cloth and polish with a piece of chamois leather.

TOMMY.—Holding the face over steaming water, then rubbing with towel, afterwards applying spirits to the face removes the black heads temporarily: the real cure, however, must be sought in regulation of the digestive system.

RANGER.—The Dead Sea gets its name from the common belief that no living thing can exist in its waters, but there are those who say that such is not the case, and that fish have been seen below the surface. Its waters are intensely salt.

PARVOLY.—Tell the young lady that a change has come over your feelings, and that it would be impossible to love her as a husband should. Even though she loves you, it is hardly possible she would care to wed one who did not love her truly.

LEMON-LOVER.—A lemon-squeezer is the simplest thing with which to extract the juice. First peel, and then cut into rather thick slices. The juice extracted in this way and rubbed on the face after a bicycle ride cools the skin most delightfully.

STRANGER.—A foreigner must be five years resident in this country before he can apply for naturalisation papers and have his name put on the roll of voters; he enjoys in the interval, however, every advantage accorded to native-born citizens.

BUTTERFLY.—French "paste" from which artificial diamonds are made is composed of a mixture of glass and oxide of tin. The ingredients are melted together, moulded into shapes and cut into facets, like genuine diamonds, only with much less labour.

AMATEUR.—Take four ounces good white soap and dissolve it in four pints of warm water. Put in the feathers, and keep drawing them through the bands under the suds till all dirt is removed. Rinse in clean hot water, and shake dry, either in the sun or before a fire.

OLD BREAKER.—It should be rubbed with a cloth dipped in French polish, which has the effect of hardening the surface. Should it simply require cleaning, all that is necessary is a rubbing with a little beeswax melted in turpentine, and a polishing with a soft cloth.

ABRENT-MINDED.—Russia paid no indemnity to Britain after the Crimean war; no part of British territory was invaded by Russia; the war was fought throughout on Turkish soil, and Russia made amends to the Sultan by giving up an important district of country known as the Danubian Principalities held by her then.

JOKER.—It is never advisable to play practical jokes on people whom you know very slightly. Some persons have a great objection to them, and very often what is only intended as a piece of fun leads to serious offence. Besides, such a form of amusement is not only childish, but frequently vulgar.

TARHIE.—Warm a quantity of new bran in a pan, taking care that it does not burn, to prevent which it must be briskly stirred. When well warmed, rub it thoroughly into the fur with the hand. Repeat this two or three times; then shake the fur, and give it another sharp brushing until free from dust.

W. G.—If the lady retains the photograph, courtesy requires that she should acknowledge receipt of it, and prudence demands that in the acknowledgment the condition of acceptance should be made plain—that is to say, she takes it as given, merely as a token of respect.

ONE IS DOUBT.—No man should marry unless able to maintain his wife at least comfortably. You and the young woman can afford to wait for three or four years, and, although we do not approve of long engagements, we should say have a perfect understanding with her parents, asking their consent to the courtship.

TADEK.—Take three cups of sugar, one cup of butter, beaten to a cream; add yolks of five well-beaten eggs, one cup of sweet milk, one teaspoonful of soda, the grated rind of a lemon; add the whites of the eggs beaten, and lemon-juice afterwards; sift as lightly as possible four and one-half cups of flour. Bake in an oblong pan and cut in squares.

IN DAYS TO COME.

In days to come we plan good deeds,
And lose the golden Now;
In days to come we mean to sow,
But we forget the vow;

In days to come!

In days to come we think we see
A harvest rich and rare;
In days to come we fain would reap,
But no ripe grain is there;

In days to come!

In days to come we dream fond dreams,
And think them real and true;
In days to come they melt away
Swift as the morning daw;

In days to come!

In days to come we treasures heap,
A store for many years;
In days to come they vanish all
And leave us only tears;

In days to come!

And yet, in days to come, there is
"A house not made with hands,"
In which, in days to come, we shall
Weave life's un woven strands.

IRONING.—Before ironing collars and cuffs, or other starched articles, rub your iron over with a bit of wax candle tied in a piece of clean muslin. Always, if possible, iron coarse articles—such as towels—before the starched things, as no matter how clean they are kept, the irons will work better after being used, a short time.

HUNTON.—The public hangman has no salary; he is paid by the job; the only exception to this arrangement is as regards London, where the sheriffs pay him a written fee which gives them the right to first call upon his services in event of two executions being fixed in different parts of the country for same day, one of these in London.

GARRING ANXIOUS.—If the young man has been corresponding with you in an affectionate manner for two years, and has given you a ring, requesting that you wear it on the engagement finger, you have a right to know that he intends to marry you. But he should make a positive proposal of marriage. Your mother or father might speak to him on the subject.

S. G. R.—Such outward show is not now so much a matter of custom as of a person's own individual feeling. People are more sensible in such matters nowadays, and do not let themselves down to any rules or regulations. If you feel you are sufficiently recovered from your sorrow as to enjoy such festivities as balls, &c., it is surely time you cast your mourning garments aside altogether. Besides, even for convention's sake, you have worn mourning quite long enough.

TOMMY'S DARLING.—All battles in modern warfare begin with an artillery duel; this at Waterloo lasted for about an hour before any movement was made by either infantry or cavalry; in the Franco-Prussian war there was a good deal of fighting at close quarters, because the rifles then in use, though a great improvement upon the weapons with which the French troops fought in the Crimea, were far from being either as precise or powerful as the rifles of to-day; still, the bulk of the slaughter was accomplished by distant rifle fire.

FROZEN MOTHER.—Let him take his own time about learning to crawl and walk. Instinct will tell him when his little legs are strong enough for their work, and if he errs in the matter it is more likely it will be from trying them too soon than too late. Bowed legs are one of the evils which arise from using the legs too early.

DULCIMER.—First rub them with lemon-juice, then with a rather soft paste made of lemon-juice and whitewash. Let this paste dry on, and when perfectly dry wipe off with a soft cloth. Be careful that none of the mixture gets between the keys. This treatment removes that yellow tinge that piano keys, unless properly cared for, are apt to get. When not in use a piano should always be kept closed.

SPRINGER.—It is entirely a matter of opinion as to whether such a practice is a proper one or not. But on the principle that there should be no secrets between husband and wife, there should be no reason against a husband opening his wife's correspondence, or vice versa. Where, however, there is dissension in the matter, the more dignified course would be to let each other's correspondence alone unless invited to read it.

A FOOLISH LASS.—The quarrel seems to have arisen out of such an absurd trifle that it is impossible to conceive that it has really grown to such serious dimensions as you describe. Surely a few words of explanation from you would put matters right. If you are foolish enough to let your pride stand in the way of a thorough understanding, then you can only blame yourself if a really serious rupture takes place.

TRoubled Mother.—It is not essential for a lad of seventeen to obtain his parents' consent to enlisting in the army, because he is then over the age at which he could be accepted as a boy, and under the age of acceptance as a man; if he enlists at all it must be by declaring that he is eighteen years of age; should he look like that the authorities will not at present release him on his real age becoming known.

BRITON.—We are not aware of free passages being granted to any British colony at present, but you can ascertain definitely by writing to Government Emigrants' Information Office, 27, Broadway, Westminster, London, S.W., on the subject: Australia, we may point out, is not, as you suppose, one colony, but six, and we doubt if any of them are at present inviting agriculturists. New Zealand would be a far more likely place for one in your circumstances.

A MARTYR TO NERVOUSNESS.—Nervousness, in young women especially, is as often as not a mere matter of manner. You should watch what others do and say in similar cases, and copy their ways and words; above all, try to cultivate the habit of taking time to think before saying anything at all. If you are a stay at home the aversion from mixing among people should be overcome. Go out into society more and you will become familiar with the subjects people talk about and discuss, and be able after a little to talk about them yourself; you will get rid of the shy, awkward feeling of being always alone, and feel eager for companionship instead of dreading it.

BARRY.—Half pound flour, one ounce of butter, two ounces lard, half teaspoonful baking powder; put all on a backboard and chop up the butter and lard with a knife among the flour into pieces like a nut; make it into a firm paste with cold water; roll this out into long piece; fold it in three even pieces, turn it half round, and roll again; fold in three, turn round, and roll once more, this last time make it into quite a thin piece, and with a round cutter cut it out into rounds for your mince pie; grease some pretty pans, and put one round on your pan; fill it with the mince meat, wet the edges, and put another round on the top, making a hole in the top; brush with egg and dust with sugar, and put it in the oven for half an hour.

IN A FIX.—Nothing but an honest confession of your mistake will avail you now. Your conduct has certainly been far from honourable so far, and every day that you allow such a state of affairs to go on makes it the more contemptible. You have certainly got yourself in a fix, and can scarcely get out of it without some humiliation. But that is a very small part of the mischief you have done if you have really won the affection of the unfortunate young lady. You do not seem to realise that it must mean something more than a little humiliation for her, though, if she is a sensible girl she will not allow herself to groan for long at the loss of one so weak and vacillating in his affections, nor envy the woman who has succeeded her. She should, indeed, consider herself lucky to be free.

THE LONDON READER.—Can be sent to any part of the world, post-free, Three-Halfpence Weekly, or Quarterly, One Shilling and Eightpence. The yearly subscription for the Monthly Part, including Christmas Part, is Eight Shillings and Eightpence, post-free.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS AND VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of any Bookseller.

NOTICE.—Double Part 466 is now Ready; price Sixpence, post free Eightpence. Also Vol. LXXXIII., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

THE INDEX to Vol. LXXXIII. is now Ready; Price One Penny, post-free, Three-Halfpence.

NOTICE.—All LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 26, Catherine Street, Strand, W.C.

* We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

THE BURGLAR'S ARGUMENT.

WHEN the burglar has the best of you and says, in a thrilling whisper, "Now, don't you stir a peg. The moment you lift a foot or finger I'll send a bullet through your head—see? Meanwhile my pal will find what there is in the house, worth the trouble of artists of our ability and reputation."

In that situation you remain quiet; not because you like the burglar's errand, but because you are convinced by his style of reasoning.

Here is a lady who was quite as much afraid of a plate of roast meat, with the vegetables that go with it, as she would have been of the fellow with a mask on his face and a pistol in his hand.

"I was so afraid of my meals," she says, "that rather than eat, I consented to starve—or something very near it. For very many years I suffered habitually from headache and indigestion. I felt heavy and languid—not the fatigue that follows work, but a kind of exhaustion which seems to come from a breakdown of the sources of strength within the body, as nearly as I can express the idea.

"My appetite—if one means by that a longing for one's victuals and enjoyment of them at the proper times—that was clean gone. I ate a bit now and then because nobody can live without eating. But it hurt me so, it gave me such misery and distress in the stomach and chest that I avoided eating as much as ever I could and not actually starve.

"I was much troubled with flatulence and continually belching wind, which had a nasty sickening taste. I got low and depressed in mind, and so weak that I was not fit for any work. To make a short story of it, I went on for years in this way—now feeling a little better and then bad as ever, but never well.

"I saw doctors and used many medicines, but nothing did me any real good until I acted on Mr. Fuller's advice and began taking Mother Seigel's Syrup. It soon relieved me and I ate with a relish. In a few weeks I was well as ever and have not had any return of my complaint since. I believe if everyone would make it a custom to keep a bottle of Mother Seigel's in the

house and take a dose—about half a teaspoonful two or three times a week—they would never have indigestion or dyspepsia as long as they lived—no matter what they ate or what kind of work they did."—Mrs. Sarah Melton, The Bakery, Pakenham, near Bury St. Edmunds, April 26, 1899.

"In the April of 1886," says another, "my health failed me. At first I felt languid, weak and weary. My appetite forsook me, and after eating ever so small a quantity I had distress in the stomach and pain at the chest—a sensation as if the food had lodged there, as, of course, it had not.

"I rested badly at night, and during the day I was so exhausted as scarcely to be able to get about. As month after month passed by I got weaker and weaker. I took all kinds of medicines, but none of them seemed to do me any good.

"My husband then heard of Mother Seigel's Syrup, and said he thought I might do well to try it. I was not of his mind, for I could see no reason why it should help me when so many other things had turned out to be no better than so much sweetened water. However, to please him, I sent for a bottle of Mother Seigel's, and in a few days I felt much better.

"I felt all right after eating, just as I used to do before the complaint came upon me. Perhaps I had used two or three bottles of the Syrup altogether when I was strong and able to do my housework once more. From this it will hardly be necessary for me to say how greatly I admire this remedy, or how much confidence I have in it. So far as I know there is nothing else in the world so good for dyspepsia and the ailments that go along with it.

"All women especially, who are so apt to have indigestion and nervous troubles, ought to know about Mother Seigel's Syrup and have a bottle where they can lay hands on it any day. It would save them many a spell of illness and many a pound of hard-earned money they cannot afford to spare—particularly for things that are no use after they are bought."—Mrs. Amelia Bonner, Nayland Road, Bures St. Mary, Suffolk, April 29, 1899.